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Draft of Op Ed piece on CII (Cuban Missile Crisis) for October 28, 1987.

October 22, Thursday

Twenty-five years ago today, at about nine o'clock Sunday morning Washington time, Moscow radio began broadcasting Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's acceptance of American terms for ending the Cuban Missile Crisis. Abandoning his demand made public just twenty-four hours earlier, Saturday morning October 27, that US IRBMs committed to NATO in Turkey be withdrawn in parallel with any withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, Khrushchev agreed on Sunday the 28th to remove them immediately with no quid pro quo beyond a US pledge not to invade Cuba. (The vague US promise, contingent on ground inspection of the removal of the missiles from Cuba was thrown into question almost immediately by Castro's persistent refusal to allow inspectors into Cuba; but Khrushchev wasted no time in removing the missiles and cooperated with low-level aerial surveillance of Soviet shipping carrying the missiles home). Khrushchev had abruptly thrown in his hand; and no one on the American side knew why. For government officials involved, and for scholars of the crisis, it has remained a mystery from that day to this.

Members of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, the Excomm, who had met in almost continuous session for the past twelve days, were as startled, astounded, and baffled by the sudden Soviet concession as they had been by the news twelve days earlier of the deployment of the missiles in defiance of earlier US warnings.

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Notes for OpEd on CII, October 22, 1987

--Twenty-five years ago this morning Khrushchev ended the Cuban missile crisis in a way that no one on the American side expected or, to this day, has understood.

With several strong cards, it seemed, left to play, he threw in his hand. Almost as soon as they were offered he accepted American terms he seemed to have ruled out only twenty-four hours earlier. Although American officials were cautioned by President Kennedy to refrain from public gloating, the terms were sure to be interpreted, as they were, as a humiliating defeat for the Soviets, and his failure in Cuba was a factor in Khrushchev's removal from office two years later. Neither President Kennedy nor any of his advisors, neither hawk nor dove, had expected Khrushchev to yield in this fashion, on these terms. (CORRECTION: Except for a brief period Friday night and early Saturday morning, 26-27 October,...when Khrushchev indicated that these very terms might be

acceptable to him, in a vaguely worded letter and, much more concretely, in an overture from a KGB chief in the Soviet Embassy in Washington via John Scali of ABC. But a public letter on the morning of 27 October seemed to supersede the proposal in the informal channel, demanding a trade involving the removal of the Turkish missiles. The transcript of the October 27 meetings, just released last week, shows that President Kennedy felt sure that the new demand superseded the earlier terms suggested in the informal channel, which had not even been presented as a definite offer of settlement; his "acceptance" of the earlier non-proposal was a probe, which held in his eyes little promise of succeeding, even though he accompanied it, secretly, with an ultimatum, a warning, and a promise, each of which had, seemingly, been rejected in the Excomm discussions of that day.

After receiving the Saturday morning demand--and for most of the preceding 12 days, except for Friday night--both hawks and doves had agreed that the Soviet missiles could be gotten out of Cuba only in one of two ways: by an American airstrike, probably followed by invasion, or by trading them out, with removal of American IRBMs in Turkey as the minimum American concession that might work. By October 27, advisors differed only on which of these two approaches better served American interests, in view of the different risks posed by each.

--The risks of general war between the US and Soviet Union were high, as President Kennedy thought--he put the probability between 1/3 and 1/2--but for reasons he did not know specifically at the time, and his advisors then have never learned.

--Why did the Cuban missile crisis end as and when it did?

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-- Note: Blockade appears "clever, wise, appropriate" in retrospect only because it won; if military action had been required eventually, it might have been accepted better diplomatically and domestically than if there had been no forewarning and no defiance by the Soviets and no attempt at negotiation by the US, but this would have been outweighed by the fact of the ensuing conflict. In fact, on Friday the 26th there was a feeling of gloom, a feeling that the blockade had been unsuccessful; this was all the more true on the 27th, after the Turkey letter and the U-2 shootdown. (See RFK, p. 61).

But why had they moved to a blockade at all? Only in preference to an airstrike; and that had not been the immediate choice of a number of advisors--including Nitze and Rusk (as Nitze told me), Ball, Stevenson, McNamara (and as I remember, Taylor!)--but rather, their response to a Presidential "finding" at the outset that the missiles were unacceptable (essentially for political reasons, just before the election). I.e., the President set the agenda, determined the alternatives (like HAK ruling out

Extrication from consideration among the Vietnam options in 1969,
or Reagan refusing to consider tax increases (and now switching
this: he will "listen" to proposals for tax increases...though he
still won't say whether he might actually accept a package with a
tax increase.)...as in Model IV.

--Why did the crisis end as and when it did?

--Because Khrushchev found himself faced on Saturday night
with what amounted to a thoroughly credible 12-hour ultimatum: if
he did not start dismantling his missiles by first light Sunday
morning he would probably lose them by a US air strike that day.

In 1964, in the course of a highly classified interagency
study I was doing of communication between governments in nuclear
crises, Robert Kennedy told me what he had said to Soviet
Ambassador Dobrynin on the evening of Saturday, October 27, 1962.
The US was going to send reconnaissance flights over Cuba on
Sunday. If one were destroyed--in addition to the U-2 destroyed
Saturday morning--"by either Cubans or Soviets" Robert Kennedy told
Dobrynin Saturday night (reflecting the unquestioned belief in the
ExCom that Khrushchev had total control over both the Soviet-
controlled SAMs and the Cuban antiaircraft artillery) the US would
promptly destroy all the SAMs, probably the SSMs as well, and would
probably proceed to an invasion of Cuba.

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Twenty-five years ago this morning, Soviet Premier Nikita
Khrushchev broadcast over Moscow radio his acceptance of American
terms for ending the Cuban missile crisis. And no one on the
American side knew why. In particular, why so suddenly, so soon
after receiving terms--amounting to American victory, calling for
the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba with no American
concession beyond a vague pledge not to invade Cuba--sent just the
night before, which simply ignored Soviet demands of the previous
morning for US missiles in Turkey to be removed

Why did Khrushchev agree to American demands for ending the crisis,
so suddenly? Why no further argument, no attempt to press for
equal treatment of Soviet missiles in Cuba and US missiles in
Turkey, both to be removed or neither?

A personal promise from RFK that US missiles in Turkey would
be removed some months later, on condition that the Soviets forego
any appearance of a deal or any reference, ever, to an American
quid pro quo for the removal of Soviet missiles...

(Delete from this article: What are not the answers; false
explanations: the private deal by RFK (inadequate, by far, close to
no concession, compared to the humiliation being demanded); the 48-
hour ultimatum, which left time for maneuvering by Khrushchev.

What did count: 1) RFK's clear rejection of the Soviet demand
for equal status in terms of the right, or non-right, to station

offensive weapons near the other's borders. US right to do so, Soviet non-right (at least, having attempted to do so secretly, with deception) were to be acknowledged. In return for this, the US would informally cease to exercise this right in the case of the Turkish Jupiters (without promising not to replace these with "less obsolete" weapons, not only Polaris but ground-based, as such were developed).

It may be that this was the main message Khrushchev was waiting for and was influenced by. He may not have needed an explicit warning on the reconnaissance; he could assume that further shootdowns would lead to retaliation, without being told. Just as Kennedy spent the day wanting to accept Khrushchev's terms, but being persuaded to try once to achieve more favorable terms, so Khrushchev may never have believed that Kennedy would accept the Turkish deal (in this he would have been mistaken--as Kennedy proved to be about Khrushchev), or he may have hoped that Kennedy would: before Castro shot down another plane (perhaps even encouraged to do this by the shootdown, however dangerous and regrettable that was). So the emphatic rejection, first (without authorization, so far as we know) by Scali to Fomin that afternoon, of the Turkish deal, followed by RFK's rejection of any deal or quid pro quo when Dobrynin raised the matter, may have been enough for Khrushchev to go back to the Fomin terms of the day before, since the harder line hadn't worked immediately.

Still, this assumes Khrushchev had very little hope for the demands of the morning of 27 October, so that it wasn't worth pressing further to achieve them. What is more likely is that their prospects, after the Scali and RFK responses, didn't seem worth the risk of continuing to press for them: precisely because that risk was considerable. What risk? The risk of loss of control to Castro and to US military response. This presumes that Khrushchev was very nervous during the 27th, knowing that Castro could seize control at any time with a lucky hit, but waiting in some hope of a favorable answer to the demands sent just before the U-2 was shot down and Castro commenced firing his antiaircraft; so that, on getting a definite response, he moved fast to relieve his own tension and escape from the situation.

Otherwise, one would still have to ask: Why did he move so fast? Why act as if these two turndowns were the last word? If he could have been sure to prevent firing at the recon, both low- and high-level, why not try one more time to get a favorable response to the "reasonable" proposal of 27 October--which, after all, had not yet been publicly turned down? The point was, he could not be sure. And he knew, like Kennedy, that the span of control of a political leader included a certain freedom to accept the other's demands and abandon one's own in private, even yielding to threats if they were not blatant, public ultimatums, neither leader had the freedom, the control over forces, to refrain from responding violently to violent attacks (much beyond a single attack on a recon plane); at the point that a large attack, or two-sided attacks, began to occur, negotiation stopped and "the logic of war"

took over. (See Khrushchev letters of 26, 27 and 28 October). That is, "rational, calculating response" (with a possible choice of concessions, backdown) is replaced by semi-automatic reflexive response, retaliation, "autonomic nervous system" (mediated by male hormones), and by bureaucratized, military routines: designed for crisis performance under great stress, kill-or-be-killed..."Deterrence" no longer, in this situation, confronts a "rational opponent," in the same sense as in the absence of actual violence, whether in "peacetime" or in a crisis that is menacing but has not yet become violent. (This difference between the CMC and the Rolling Thunder operation was not adequately realized).

Thus, it was more important than I noticed before today that RFK really did explicitly reject the Turkey deal, just as Scali had in his outburst, and just as the State letter in the draft that RFK rejected. The difference from the State letter was that RFK's rejection (like Scali's) was private, not public (and the State letter--establishing that JFK had not immediately accepted the demand from Khrushchev--was meant to be made public, as it was. JFK intended, the next day, to accept the proposal as it apparently came from U Thant, not from Khrushchev. Why, then, should Khrushchev have found the rejection credible? Because Scali's reaction seemed so sincere, so spontaneous, presumably rejecting "highest authorities"; and because RFK constituted the ultimate "private channel." So far as JFK and Rusk were concerned, RFK's rejection was a lie, false, a bluff; so that his message was as great an "abuse" of a private channel as Bolshakov's assurance from Mikoyan that no SSMS would be sent. RFK may or may not have known of the Rusk message to Cordier; but he presumably did know how open his brother was to a public trade, and he had deliberately crafted the public letter to allow that possibility. (I wonder how the Soviets, starting with Dobrynin, interpreted Kennedy's failure to address their Turkish proposal at all. Reportedly, Mikoyan or Burlatsky said that they found it--understandably--quite puzzling: i.e., the references to the letter of 26 October were incomprehensible, since that letter had made no proposal at all. But they didn't have much time to think about it--by my hypothesis--or to pursue the possibility (actually true) that it meant to leave an opening for the deal.) So he knew he was lying when he said there could be no deal.

The next point is that, without knowing it, he was allowing no time for the Soviets to explore the possibility that he was bluffing, that there was possible give in the US position: as JFK and RFK expected they would, in which case they were going to discover that there was, indeed, lots of give. Why not simply give an explicit 12-hour ultimatum? Because it was too likely that that would trigger strong resistance, and controversy on the Soviet side--over whether the US would really carry out such a threat, in the absence of a violent provocation: and if the Soviets could have prevented giving any such provocation, they were too likely to defy the US demand, or to fail to meet it by the deadline, in which case the US would be challenged to do what JFK did not, in fact, want to do: strike and invade. Or else, humiliating, back down from its

own ultimatum. Whereas, given what RFK had actually said, and the actual situation (of Castro control of antiaircraft), Khrushchev knew that the US was virtually sure to react automatically to the shootdown of a recon plane, and was sure to send recon, whereas he could concede without, at least, backing down to a public ultimatum. (Did RFK promise, explicitly or implicitly, to keep the 48-hour ultimatum secret, as he demanded that his conditional promise on the Turkish IRBMs must be secret? Was this implied by his "acknowledgement", according to Dobrynin, that JFK might "lose control" to the military? In fact, did he really give an ultimatum--Gromyko and Khrushchev do not, after all, refer to one, which might be because they don't want to admit receiving one, but could be because RFK, as they quoted him, actually put the threat not as emanating from JFK but as emerging from military pressure, especially if more planes were shot down, but even if they were not. This would be consistent with the Oct 26 transcript, and with his memoir. The "48 hours" he told me might have meant the amount of time he could hold off the military, even if more planes were not shot down: less, if planes were shot down

JFK's reaction on October 27 suggests--since he didn't see this as a great defeat or backdown, but as a reasonable offer--that he saw something like this from the beginning as the way to get the missiles out. (Unless he was temporarily seduced by the thought of an air strike--proposed by no less than Acheson, etc.) But why then, the blockade? And what could he claim that it had accomplished, to justify the risk he had taken of military clash with the Soviets and the appearance of illegality ("piracy")? Just: limiting the threat, preventing any more missiles coming in, and, he hoped, getting work on them stopped, keeping them from being operational, an "immediate threat." (Even the aim of getting work stopped seemed to have failed on 26-27 October). Mainly, the blockade was needed to accompany the admission that his own previous assurance had been mistaken (and he had been over-credulous of Soviet assurances) with a "strong" action, and an apparent determination to get the missiles out that was not limited to negotiation. (As HAK said, "How can you negotiate without a threat of escalation?" The answer is, you can, but in this case, it would not have been politically healthy for JFK to appear to the Republicans and the public to be doing so.

So maybe RFK's threat on 27 October was a threat of losing control. (This currently relies only on Russian sources, though it is interesting that Schlesinger quotes them without mocking them. Note that JFK, McN, did seem to assume in the Oct 27 transcript that more planes would be shot at (though there is no discussion of a possible ultimatum not to shoot, except by McCone. So maybe what RFK said to Dobrynin wasn't as inconsistent with JFK's mood as I had thought, in terms of presenting an actual ultimatum, coming from the President. Maybe it was like tough bargaining, calling on K to agree to a deal in between what he had demanded (and which Kennedy was willing to accept, personally, and would by tomorrow) and what Kennedy's advisors (e.g., Thompson) wanted (no change in Turkish missiles forced upon Turkey and NATO) (This didn't give K

much, though, and JFK didn't expect him to accept it.) The inducement to accept it was that, paraphrasing me that afternoon, "The military would otherwise bomb his Goddamn missiles." I.e., he wouldn't be able to hold them back more than 48 hours, after the shootdown that day--I bet that he told Dobrynin that the President had had to countermand an earlier order to strike back, and to restrain both his civilians and his military: though neither RFK nor the Russians report this specifically--and couldn't hold them that long if there was another shootdown.

The only lie in this--since he wouldn't be saying that the President would choose to bomb in 48 hours if he didn't get them out (thus, not an ultimatum but a statement of fact: it wouldn't be the President's will, but forces beyond his control)--was there "could be" no quid pro quo, no deal. But maybe the "under this kind of pressure or threat" meant, "demanded by Soviets." So if U Thant asked it, the President was prepared to accede, even though his advisors wouldn't like that we were acknowledging an equality of status. It would be yielding to U Thant's concern for world peace, not to Khrushchev's definition of fairness (even though Kennedy shared that, which he didn't want to press against his advisors). (McG B, for example, clearly opposed this; and Thompson didn't think it necessary, and thought it would be taken as weakness).

The fact remains that JFK did go along with McG B and Thompson, et al, to the point of rejecting--privately, though not publicly--the Khrushchev's proposal of a trade. He didn't expect Khrushchev to accept this, after making a public demand: but he went further to make a threat he could hardly have discussed in the ExCom, and did not: that there were enough people in the ExCom, not only military but civilian, who wanted either to invade Cuba, or to strike the missiles, or to hit hard if a recon plane was shot down, or to risk TN war rather than to trade publicly, that he could not hold off military action very long unless Khrushchev conceded. And this may even have been realistic, a "statement of fact" --supported by the transcript--subject only to the qualification that Kennedy could avoid this outcome, if Khrushchev did not concede, by conceding himself, though at great political cost: and that he was, in fact, prepared to do this, though for bargaining purposes he denied this, or failed to suggest it. Even so, Khrushchev could have suggested it--refusing to believe, say, that Kennedy did not have the courage or the control to take this path to avoid war (and Khrushchev could have played the same tactic back, claiming that he himself could not afford to make such a concessions, which was, after all, much greater than he was asking of Kennedy, which was basically to acknowledge equality of status, not US inferiority: admittedly a big change in the past status quo. This K could have done if only he had had a few hours to bargain; but he didn't, unknown to Kennedy. For Khrushchev, it wasn't a matter of losing control of his military forces "if" another plane was shot down or his adversary was adamant for another 24-48 hours. He had already lost control of his military forces, or of those of his ally; the only order he could give that could protect him

(without certainty) from the consequences of his ally's determination to fire at invading aircraft was the order to start dismantling his missiles.

Blight conjectures that JFK feared loss of control of his own forces, effectively; and this is supported by the transcript (e.g., McNamara's description of the likely course of events). But there is only Russian evidence that RFK actually used this as a threat (though see Schlesinger on Nov 19: RFK threat to renew low-level reconnaissance, essentially a threat of loss of control to Castro and to the American military). Blight, rather, imagines that it led JFK to make a "concession" on the Turkish missiles--he repeated this on NPR today, October 23, despite our conversations--whereas the real point is that, despite his justified fear and his willingness to trade publicly--he actually refrained from doing this. (In this sense, he, like Khrushchev on October 27, had himself already lost control to the military and the hawks--who included some of the blockaders of the previous week, apparently including McNamara).

JFK must have felt, after 22-23 October, boxed in by his hawks and dawks and hoves. Having been tough, on 22-24 October, he wanted to prepare to trade; he wanted to be asked by the Turks to replace their IRBMS with Polaris, so he could trade the missiles in Turkey for the missiles in Cuba. (McNamara thought such a deal to be necessary; in fact, they would be lucky to get away without having to trade Guantanamo as well.) Yet it wasn't happening, partly because of the perceived attitudes of the Turks. His fury seems to have been, not a failure to get IRBMs out earlier (as RFK said, and others) but the failure during that week to even approach the Turks to get them to ask him out. (Note his strategy, reported by Schlesinger as well as by RFK to me: a) to get a coalition government in Vietnam, as in Laos, which would ask us out. And the Rusk letter: get U Thant to ask...since the Turks wouldn't, and since his own State people and Nitze wouldn't even approach the Turks to do this. (See my own sick feeling about this!) This was the insubordination he faced! (RFK: "He thought he was President." But RFK won't admit what JFK really wanted to do, or what he had been trying to set up that week.)

So as of October 27, the President found that what he regarded as an acceptable alternative to striking or invading Cuba and warring with the Soviet Union, was regarded as unacceptable by most of his advisors, not only the military but most of his civilians, including many of those counted as "doves" by the standards of the previous week (advocates of blockade as a first move, rather than air strike). Unlike himself, they preferred to risk war, or even to strike Cuba, than to make this concession: and admit equal status to the Soviet Union, abandoning a major premise of the Cold War, and risking our hegemony in NATO.

They did not convince him, or make him give up his willingness to trade, let alone make him willing to go to war. Why then did he risk war one more day, giving in to their approach, making their

demands on Russia, on Saturday? Probably (a) because he underestimated the risks of doing this, overestimating the effects of his warning on recon to Khrushchev,. not realizing that K did not control the antiaircraft and perhaps not even the SAMS, not realizing that he was warning the wrong party (whereas the party really in control of the AA, Castro, could almost surely not be deterred at that point); (b) because just before election, he could not afford the risk of a major break within the ExCom or a leak: e.g., from the JCS, of his true attitude. If he had had to accept U Thant's proposal, still worse if he accepted Khrushchev's, he would have anticipated disaster in the election, with leaks from his ExCom or JCS or even open denunciation from some of them: he had some Republicans in there, starting with McCone, but including nominally, Dillon, Lovett, Nitze, and still more hawks. As it was, according to Schlesinger he was not sanguine about the effects of his failure to dislodge Castro on the election, though there he was too pessimistic.

[Compaq]

C:\CII\oped.2

25 October 1987

Outline and draft of oped

On 25th, K ended crisis. No American knew why. No one expected, from hawk to dove, it would end so soon, or end that way, with a Soviet capitulation without Americans having fired a shot. Nor has any explanation been offered since.

Diverse information revealed only this month, in observance of the 25th anniversary, provides a sufficient answer to that puzzle, bearing on what K probably feared if he did not settle immediately; and bears on some other questions: What would probably have happened if K had not? What were the risks of war? (Was Kennedy wrong? How consistent were his actual actions with his--correct--high assessment of the risk?) How valid were various assessments of the risks of war, and how did proposals and actual decisions conform to these assessments? The answers are not reassuring about the risks in the Persian Gulf today, where American and Soviet warships, so far, coexist uneasily, but where attack can come, as the Stark found, from "friendly" forces or by mines of unknown origin, and both confront loosely-controlled forces of half a dozen nations whose motivations are unknown and relationships shifting and shadowy.

Bring in:

--JCS, 28 October, on recon planes, and tac nucs

--JFK on uncertainty as to SAM; but assumption of escalation, if SAM; SAM vs. artillery; but lack of doubt as to control of AA.

Taylor/JFK reasons for sending more recon.

--McCone on ultimatum on recon; Decision, no U2 but low-level; McN on hitting SAMs (pres was not looking for an excuse to hit SAMs\ sent RFK with warning). (RFK had other things to say that evening, which drew more attention when revealed publicly in 1968; but it may be what he had to say on recon had most impact. (US failure to respond would not be repeated, nor recon called off; nor would public trade be acceptable, only private trade and no-invasion pledge...otherwise US airstrike in 48 hours, even if no recon hit).

--Fulbright recommendation: invade, don't blockade: in assumption that risks would less, confronting Cubans; actually, not just 3500 Soviets estimated by 22 October, or the 10,000 estimated later in the week--armed with FROGS (revealed by low-level recon)--but at least 22,000: Mikoyan says 40,000. So we didn't know as of 27 October what forces we would actually encounter if we invaded!

--JCS recommendation, after U2, on Oct 27: tac nucs, low level recon.

--Castro to Mank, Szulc, on AA

--Burlatsky on nervousness, as surrender message sent.

--Burlatsky, Mikoyan: K hadn't authorized the shooting; very concerned over reaction.

--K: "A smell of scorching hung in the air." To those educated by

new information on the past, that warning scent drifts on the wind today, from the direction of the Persian Gulf.

--Reagan: "There will be no war, because the Iranians are not that dumb."

Hawks in 1962 were confident that war would not go beyond Cuba, because Khrushchev was rational, responsible and outgunned. Kennedy and McNamara were not so sure. (Still less, for McNamara, after Vietnam). Yet they postponed settling on Khrushchev's terms, even though JFK personally found them reasonable; McNamara even favored hitting the SAMs the next day, on the "assumption," though evidence was inconclusive, that Soviets had destroyed our U-2 (as when he recommended hitting North Vietnam on August 4 on inconclusive evidence--sufficient for CINCPAC--that Vietnamese had attacked our destroyer). (Not only had he not learned better in Cuba, he missed the difference between threats and actual attacks when it came to influencing an opponent; it may well be that Khrushchev would not, could not, have backed down if McNamara's desire to signal with bombs on 27-28 October had been followed, rather than RFK's ultimatum.)

Then as now, hawks did not assume that our opponent would back down without our firing a shot (they were amazed, and are still puzzled, that that is what he did); their confidence in violent coercive tactics was that our adversary, though malign, was rational, totally in control of his forces, carefully calculating, prudent, and outgunned. It is not clear that Reagan believes any of these things, except the last, about the Ayatollah Khomeini, nor should he. Yet even his critics tend to say, "We were unwise to involve our prestige and our military forces in the Persian Gulf; but now that we are there, we cannot pull out... yet."

Some of these were saying the same to Reagan before, and even after, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon; fortunately, he didn't listen then. He "cut and ran"--and paid no price at all in the next year's election--and who now thinks he should have "stayed the course" or sent in more Marines? Khrushchev got this advice in 1962 from his own subordinates: Cousins quote. He got out fast, when he saw he was losing control. If he had waited, he might have won, and kept his job. Should he have waited, a few more hours: crossing his fingers while Castro fired at our planes?

Aside from Reagan's touching confidence that Iranian leaders--perhaps the moderates he sought to strengthen with his arms trades--are not dumb enough to blunder into war, can he be sure that they are totally in control of Revolutionary Guard gunboats, or even missile crews? Is this question being asked? The Best and the Brightest under Kennedy were not less astute than the current crisis managers, but they failed to ask it in 1962, and some who had a real sense of high risk failed to reflect it in the threats they sponsored. In fact, the same men, now working under Johnson, acted two years later on the assumption that Hanoi totally controlled the actions of the NLF and, even more dubiously, that Russia could determine Hanoi's policies. (This was more true under

Nixon). We cannot count on men in the Pentagon or White House or State to appraise the uncertainties realistically or to act on them prudently when they do. That is why a War Powers Act--preferably much strengthened, and certainly enforced--is needed, to bring the Congressional role in the nuclear age much closer to what the Constitution wisely intended. It is the case for closing out a misbegotten policy fast, before civilian control is lost and "the laws of war" takes over utterly, as Khrushchev did 25 years ago.

AHA! The moral for today is: act like Khrushchev, in a situation as fraught with disaster, as unpredictable and ill-controlled as the Cuban Crisis was on October 28, and the Persian Gulf is today. Khrushchev was right--was he not?--even though had he followed his advisors he might have won the crisis and kept his job: if Castro's gunners had missed again. Were Kennedy's advisors right--granted that they did win, and that Kennedy would have lost if he had ignored them? Would it have been better to have tested what the hawks believed, that battle could have been joined and the outcome would have been a success by prewar standards, because the Soviets would have capitulated and withdrawn from combat before our losses exceeded the rewards of winning?

Those who thought the risks were low counted on Khrushchev's willingness to back down when he saw that the US was resolute, knowing that he was outgunned. But the real victory was achieved before any shots were fired by the US--it might not have been achievable otherwise--and it did not reflect the balance of forces: Khrushchev would have expected an American reaction to further loss of American forces even if he had strategic superiority or parity; and he could not prevent further loss of American forces, because he could not control Castro, despite Castro's economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union. (Conceivably, if he had had superiority, he could have "forbidden" the US to undertake any more recon, even against their neighbor and even after they had committed themselves, on pain of being shot down).

Today, as then, the President is confronted almost unanimously with advice (now, from outside the Executive branch) to stay the course, don't get out or change course precipitately (as both leaders were in the Cuban Missile Crisis); Kennedy, against his personal judgment, took their advice, and won; Khrushchev ignored them, in the end (though at that point, they all may have come around to his view, after RFK's warning and rejection of their hardline proposal) and grasped defeat. He lost his job--though he would not likely have done better if he had persisted and war had resulted--and might have won had he stayed in: but was he wrong or right to get out? Are our odds really better in the Persian Gulf? Are we even in a position to judge? (If the answer to the latter question is "no," we should get out: not "later," not "when we can do it safely and gracefully," not "when the costs of getting out are less.")

I was saying this in 1969. Was I wrong? My advice was not

followed, nor Goodell's, nor McGovern-Hatfield's for years. When it was, years later, the results were not altogether happy (though not worse, in Vietnam, than I had feared). Should we have stayed on? Were we right not to have gotten out earlier?

What might have happened if Khrushchev had delayed accepting Kennedy's terms for another day, either remaining silent or making countermoves and threats, pressing his own earlier demands? Rusk reveals that Kennedy had prepared the option of accepting Khrushchev's terms on Sunday, with the mediation of U Thant, if Khrushchev had not accepted his own. So Khrushchev might have won. And this might have happened even if US recon planes had been shot down, as Castro expected. History would have been very different.

But Khrushchev foresaw another possible course: US recon shot at and downed, a large US strike against all SAMS and probably the SSMS too, followed by US invasion: which would have engaged 20-40,000 Soviet troops (put aside the question of whether they had tactical nuclear warheads with them! US authorities would probably be skeptical that the Soviets could have been so incautious as to send such warheads with their troops; but then, they didn't expect them to send troops or missiles, either, and we don't know to this day whether warheads for the missiles had been sent...). Could he have managed to say then, to the Soviet generals demanding a counterstrike in Berlin or Turkey, "To hell with these maniacs" and defied them, accepting a wartime defeat? What would it have taken, then, before one leader or the other accepted to be called coward, failure, traitor, by his own subordinates and allies?

By the night of the 27th, even his concession could not surely avoid this course of events; and nothing else that he could do could even reduce the probability of it, which was high. He did the only thing he could do to avoid it, and he was not wrong.

That moment of truth, for those who have a nose for the smell of scorching, is not sometime in the future of our involvement in the Persian Gulf. It was yesterday, last month, last week; it is not later than now.

CII\oped.2
24 October 1987
Outline of oped. on CII

Why did Khrushchev fold his hand in the CMC: so fast, on American terms?

Why didn't he postpone his acceptance by half a day or more, make counteroffers, press for a public trade, make counterthreats?

What would have happened if he had?

What were the risks of war? How close did it come?

What lessons could be drawn for the risks of war today?
What raises them, how to lower them?

What standard "lessons" of the CMC are wrong, in the light of this explanation and the evidence it rests on?

What newly revealed information bears on these questions?

On last question: -

--My interview with RFK

--Castro to Mankiewicz and Szulc, on antiaircraft

--Burlatsky on "nervousness"

--Burlatsky and Mikoyan: SAM unauthorized

--Mikoyan: insubordinate Soviet

--Burlatsky: Cuban, Castro

--Statsenko, Castro, Khrushchev: Cuban

--Castro to Szulc: Soviet

--Firefight (according to Hersh, multiple sources;

--Different possibilities: SAM, AA, mixed crews

--Khrushchev: Chinese and Albanians

--smell of scorching

--Persian Gulf

--October 27 transcript

--lack of guess about Cuban independence

--lack of guess about SAM unauthorized

--JFK ready to make "fair" trade; "over-ruled" by his advisors (NOTE: a) as Excom guessed about Khrushchev, with respect to 27 October letter demanding trade; d b) as RFK is said by Russians--Gromyko/Dobrynin, Khrushchev--to have warned about JFK: transcript supports this (both his differing from consensus, his yielding, basis for fear of political costs if he defies others); even , some military insubordination (SAC U-2, SAC alert; what about story of planes on way to Cuba, Seattle paper?)

--McCone suggestion of ultimatum on recon

--subsequent secrecy, lies, about JFK position

--bearing on (mis-reporting of) October 26 letter; JFK anger relating to Turkish missiles; Bobby "ploy"; Bobby attitude on State draft; relation of RFK/Dobrynin talk to State draft; JFK tristesse after victory, his feelings as to whether he should have given in to advisors (even though he won thereby): would wrong lessons be learned as a results?; yes; had he had a right to blockade, given that his advisors had proven so adamant against a peaceful, compromise solution once confrontation was in progress, difficulty he had getting out without war (i.e., did his own advisors end up scaring him? Not only the military. Maybe he was able to "admit" this to Dobrynin--to strengthen threat, make it other than an ultimatum, appeal to him to help JFK against his own hawks, and JFK would help K likewise: recall Ho Chi Minh to Sainteny in 1946, Give me something to go back with; others are harder than I am; if it comes to a fight...Jackie told this to JFK, recalled it in 1972...But in this case it was the stronger appealing to the weaker, Let me Win: my colleagues demand it, see it as our right; if you don't give it, I will have to kill ten of yours for one of ours...in the end, we are both dead...This is what Khrushchev complained of in Vienna: You capitalists know how to make subtle threats...

\CII\Oped

Draft of Op Ed piece on CII (Cuban Missile Crisis) for October 28, 1987.

October 22, Thursday

Twenty-five years ago today, at about nine o'clock Sunday morning Washington time, Moscow radio began broadcasting Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's acceptance of American terms for ending the Cuban Missile Crisis. Abandoning his demand made public just twenty-four hours earlier, Saturday morning October 27, that US IRBMs committed to NATO in Turkey be withdrawn in parallel with any withdrawal of Soviet missiles from Cuba, Khrushchev agreed on Sunday the 28th to remove them immediately with no quid pro quo beyond a US pledge not to invade Cuba. (The vague US promise, contingent on ground inspection of the removal of the missiles from Cuba was thrown into question almost immediately by Castro's persistent refusal to allow inspectors into Cuba; but Khrushchev wasted no time in removing the missiles and cooperated with low-level aerial surveillance of Soviet shipping carrying the missiles home). Khrushchev had abruptly thrown in his hand; and no one on the American side knew why. For government officials involved, and for scholars of the crisis, it has remained a mystery from that day to this.

Members of the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, the Excomm, who had met in almost continuous session for the past twelve days, were as startled, astounded, and baffled by the sudden Soviet concession as they had been by the news twelve days earlier of the deployment of the missiles in defiance of earlier US warnings.

C:\CII\Oped.1

Notes for OpEd on CII, October 22, 1987

--Twenty-five years ago this morning Khrushchev ended the Cuban missile crisis in a way that no one on the American side expected or, to this day, has understood.

With several strong cards, it seemed, left to play, he threw in his hand. Almost as soon as they were offered he accepted American terms he seemed to have ruled out only twenty-four hours earlier. Although American officials were cautioned by President Kennedy to refrain from public gloating, the terms were sure to be interpreted, as they were, as a humiliating defeat for the Soviets, and his failure in Cuba was a factor in Khrushchev's removal from office two years later. Neither President Kennedy nor any of his advisors, neither hawk nor dove, had expected Khrushchev to yield in this fashion, on these terms.

(CORRECTION: Except for a brief period Friday night and early Saturday morning, 26-27 October,...when Khrushchev indicated that

these very terms might be acceptable to him, in a vaguely worded letter and, much more concretely, in an overture from a KGB chief in the Soviet Embassy in Washington via John Scali of ABC. But a public letter on the morning of 27 October seemed to supersede the proposal in the informal channel, demanding a trade involving the removal of the Turkish missiles. The transcript of the October 27 meetings, just released last week, shows that President Kennedy felt sure that the new demand superseded the earlier terms suggested in the informal channel, which had not even been presented as a definite offer of settlement; his "acceptance" of the earlier non-proposal was a probe, which held in his eyes little promise of succeeding, even though he accompanied it, secretly, with an ultimatum, a warning, and a promise, each of which had, seemingly, been rejected in the Excomm discussions of that day.

After receiving the Saturday morning demand--and for most of the preceding 12 days, except for Friday night--both hawks and doves had agreed that the Soviet missiles could be gotten out of Cuba only in one of two ways: by an American airstrike, probably followed by invasion, or by trading them out, with removal of American IRBMs in Turkey as the minimum American concession that might work. By October 27, advisors differed only on which of these two approaches better served American interests, in view of the different risks posed by each.

--The risks of general war between the US and Soviet Union were high, as President Kennedy thought--he put the probability between 1/3 and 1/2--but for reasons he did not know specifically at the time, and his advisors then have never learned.

--Why did the Cuban missile crisis end as and when it did?

--Why did the Cuban missile crisis end as and when it did?

-- Note: Blockade appears "clever, wise, appropriate" in retrospect only because it won; if military action had been required eventually, it might have been accepted better diplomatically and domestically than if there had been no forewarning and no defiance by the Soviets and no attempt at negotiation by the US, but this would have been outweighed by the fact of the ensuing conflict. In fact, on Friday the 26th there was a feeling of gloom, a feeling that the blockade had been unsuccessful; this was all the more true on the 27th, after the Turkey letter and the U-2 shootdown. (See RFK, p. 61).

But why had they moved to a blockade at all? Only in preference to an airstrike; and that had not been the immediate choice of a number of advisors--including Nitze and Rusk (as Nitze told me), Ball, Stevenson, McNamara (and as I remember, Taylor!)--but rather, their response to a Presidential "finding" at the outset that the missiles were unacceptable (essentially for political reasons, just before the election). I.e., the

President set the agenda, determined the alternatives (like HAK ruling out Extrication from consideration among the Vietnam options in 1969, or Reagan refusing to consider tax increases (and now switching this: he will "listen" to proposals for tax increases...though he still won't say whether he might actually accept a package with a tax increase.)...as in Model IV.

--Why did the crisis end as and when it did?

--Because Khrushchev found himself faced on Saturday night with what amounted to a thoroughly credible 12-hour ultimatum: if he did not start dismantling his missiles by first light Sunday morning he would probably lose them by a US air strike that day.

In 1964, in the course of a highly classified interagency study I was doing of communication between governments in nuclear crises, Robert Kennedy told me what he had said to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin on the evening of Saturday, October 27, 1962. The US was going to send reconnaissance flights over Cuba on Sunday. If one were destroyed--in addition to the U-2 destroyed Saturday morning--"by either Cubans or Soviets" Robert Kennedy told Dobrynin Saturday night (reflecting the unquestioned belief in the ExCom that Khrushchev had total control over both the Soviet-controlled SAMs and the Cuban antiaircraft artillery) the US would promptly destroy all the SAMs, probably the SSMs as well, and would probably proceed to an invasion of Cuba.

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Twenty-five years ago this morning, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev broadcast over Moscow radio his acceptance of American terms for ending the Cuban missile crisis. And no one on the American side knew why. In particular, why so suddenly, so soon after receiving terms--amounting to American victory, calling for the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba with no American concession beyond a vague pledge not to invade Cuba--sent just the night before, which simply ignored Soviet demands of the previous morning for US missiles in Turkey to be removed

Why did Khrushchev agree to American demands for ending the crisis, so suddenly? Why no further argument, no attempt to press for equal treatment of Soviet missiles in Cuba and US missiles in Turkey, both to be removed or neither?

A personal promise from RFK that US missiles in Turkey would be removed some months later, on condition that the Soviets forego any appearance of a deal or any reference, ever, to an American quid pro quo for the removal of Soviet missiles...

(Delete from this article: What are not the answers; false explanations: the private deal by RFK (inadequate, by far, close to no concession, compared to the humiliation being demanded); the 48-hour ultimatum, which left time for maneuvering by Khrushchev.

What did count: 1) RFK's clear rejection of the Soviet demand for equal status in terms of the right, or non-right, to station offensive weapons near the other's borders. US right to do so, Soviet non-right (at least, having attempted to do so secretly, with deception) were to be acknowledged. In return for this, the US would informally cease to exercise this right in the case of the Turkish Jupiters (without promising not to replace these with "less obsolete" weapons, not only Polaris but ground-based, as such were developed).

It may be that this was the main message Khrushchev was waiting for and was influenced by. He may not have needed an explicit warning on the reconnaissance; he could assume that further shootdowns would lead to retaliation, without being told. Just as Kennedy spent the day wanting to accept Khrushchev's terms, but being persuaded to try once to achieve more favorable terms, so Khrushchev may never have believed that Kennedy would accept the Turkish deal (in this he would have been mistaken--as Kennedy proved to be about Khrushchev), or he may have hoped that Kennedy would: before Castro shot down another plane (perhaps even encouraged to do this by the shootdown, however dangerous and regrettable that was). So the emphatic rejection, first (without authorization, so far as we know) by Scali to Fomin that afternoon, of the Turkish deal, followed by RFK's rejection of any deal or quid pro quo when Dobrynin raised the matter, may have been enough for Khrushchev to go back to the Fomin terms of the day before, since the harder line hadn't worked immediately.

Still, this assumes Khrushchev had very little hope for the demands of the morning of 27 October, so that it wasn't worth pressing further to achieve them. What is more likely is that their prospects, after the Scali and RFK responses, didn't seem worth the risk of continuing to press for them: precisely because that risk was considerable. What risk? The risk of loss of control to Castro and to US military response. This presumes that Khrushchev was very nervous during the 27th, knowing that Castro could seize control at any time with a lucky hit, but waiting in some hope of a favorable answer to the demands sent just before the U-2 was shot down and Castro commenced firing his antiaircraft; so that, on getting a definite response, he moved fast to relieve his own tension and escape from the situation.

Otherwise, one would still have to ask: Why did he move so fast? Why act as if these two turndowns were the last word? If he could have been sure to prevent firing at the recon, both low- and high-level, why not try one more time to get a favorable response to the "reasonable" proposal of 27 October--which, after all, had not yet been publicly turned down? The point was, he could not be sure. And he knew, like Kennedy, that the span of control of a political leader included a certain freedom to accept the other's demands and abandon one's own in private, even yielding to threats if they were not blatant, public ultimatums, neither leader had the freedom, the control over forces, to refrain from responding violently to violent attacks (much beyond

a single attack on a recon plane); at the point that a large attack, or two-sided attacks, began to occur, negotiation stopped and "the logic of war" took over. (See Khrushchev letters of 26, 27 and 28 October). That is, "rational, calculating response" (with a possible choice of concessions, backdown) is replaced by semi-automatic reflexive response, retaliation, "autonomic nervous system" (mediated by male hormones), and by bureaucratized, military routines: designed for crisis performance under great stress, kill-or-be-killed... "Deterrence" no longer, in this situation, confronts a "rational opponent," in the same sense as in the absence of actual violence, whether in "peacetime" or in a crisis that is menacing but has not yet become violent. (This difference between the CMC and the Rolling Thunder operation was not adequately realized).

Thus, it was more important than I noticed before today that RFK really did explicitly reject the Turkey deal, just as Scali had in his outburst, and just as the State letter in the draft that RFK rejected. The difference from the State letter was that RFK's rejection (like Scali's) was private, not public (and the State letter--establishing that JFK had not immediately accepted the demand from Khrushchev--was meant to be made public, as it was. JFK intended, the next day, to accept the proposal as it apparently came from U Thant, not from Khrushchev. Why, then, should Khrushchev have found the rejection credible? Because Scali's reaction seemed so sincere, so spontaneous, presumably rejecting "highest authorities"; and because RFK constituted the ultimate "private channel." So far as JFK and Rusk were concerned, RFK's rejection was a lie, false, a bluff; so that his message was as great an "abuse" of a private channel as Bolshakov's assurance from Mikoyan that no SSMS would be sent. RFK may or may not have known of the Rusk message to Cordier; but he presumably did know how open his brother was to a public trade, and he had deliberately crafted the public letter to allow that possibility. (I wonder how the Soviets, starting with Dobrynin, interpreted Kennedy's failure to address their Turkish proposal at all. Reportedly, Mikoyan or Burlatsky said that they found it--understandably--quite puzzling: i.e., the references to the letter of 26 October were incomprehensible, since that letter had made no proposal at all. But they didn't have much time to think about it--by my hypothesis--or to pursue the possibility (actually true) that it meant to leave an opening for the deal.) So he knew he was lying when he said there could be no deal.

The next point is that, without knowing it, he was allowing no time for the Soviets to explore the possibility that he was bluffing, that there was possible give in the US position: as JFK and RFK expected they would, in which case they were going to discover that there was, indeed, lots of give. Why not simply give an explicit 12-hour ultimatum? Because it was too likely that that would trigger strong resistance, and controversy on the Soviet side--over whether the US would really carry out such a threat, in the absence of a violent provocation: and if the Soviets could have prevented giving any such provocation, they

were too likely to defy the US demand, or to fail to meet it by the deadline, in which case the US would be challenged to do what JFK did not, in fact, want to do: strike and invade. Or else, humiliating, back down from its own ultimatum. Whereas, given what RFK had actually said, and the actual situation (of Castro control of antiaircraft), Khrushchev knew that the US was virtually sure to react automatically to the shootdown of a recon plane, and was sure to send recon, whereas he could concede without, at least, backing down to a public ultimatum. (Did RFK promise, explicitly or implicitly, to keep the 48-hour ultimatum secret, as he demanded that his conditional promise on the Turkish IRBMs must be secret? Was this implied by his "acknowledgement", according to Dobrynin, that JFK might "lose control" to the military? In fact, did he really give an ultimatum--Gromyko and Khrushchev do not, after all, refer to one, which might be because they don't want to admit receiving one, but could be because RFK, as they quoted him, actually put the threat not as emanating from JFK but as emerging from military pressure, especially if more planes were shot down, but even if they were not. This would be consistent with the Oct 26 transcript, and with his memoir. The "48 hours" he told me might have meant the amount of time he could hold off the military, even if more planes were not shot down: less, if planes were shot down

JFK's reaction on October 27 suggests--since he didn't see this as a great defeat or backdown, but as a reasonable offer--that he saw something like this from the beginning as the way to get the missiles out. (Unless he was temporarily seduced by the thought of an air strike--proposed by no less than Acheson, etc.) But why then, the blockade? And what could he claim that it had accomplished, to justify the risk he had taken of military clash with the Soviets and the appearance of illegality ("piracy")? Just: limiting the threat, preventing any more missiles coming in, and, he hoped, getting work on them stopped, keeping them from being operational, an "immediate threat." (Even the aim of getting work stopped seemed to have failed on 26-27 October). Mainly, the blockade was needed to accompany the admission that his own previous assurance had been mistaken (and he had been over-credulous of Soviet assurances) with a "strong" action, and an apparent determination to get the missiles out that was not limited to negotiation. (As HAK said, "How can you negotiate without a threat of escalation?" The answer is, you can, but in this case, it would not have been politically healthy for JFK to appear to the Republicans and the public to be doing so.

So maybe RFK's threat on 27 October was a threat of losing control. (This currently relies only on Russian sources, though it is interesting that Schlesinger quotes them without mocking them. Note that JFK, McN, did seem to assume in the Oct 27 transcript that more planes would be shot at (though there is no discussion of a possible ultimatum not to shoot, except by McCone. So maybe what RFK said to Dobrynin wasn't as inconsistent with JFK's mood as I had thought, in terms of

presenting an actual ultimatum, coming from the President. Maybe it was like tough bargaining, calling on K to agree to a deal in between what he had demanded (and which Kennedy was willing to accept, personally, and would by tomorrow) and what Kennedy's advisors (e.g., Thompson) wanted (no change in Turkish missiles forced upon Turkey and NATO) (This didn't give K much, though, and JFK didn't expect him to accept it.) The inducement to accept it was that, paraphrasing me that afternoon, "The military would otherwise bomb his Goddamn missiles." I.e., he wouldn't be able to hold them back more than 48 hours, after the shootdown that day--I bet that he told Dobrynin that the President had had to countermand an earlier order to strike back, and to restrain both his civilians and his military: though neither RFK nor the Russians report this specifically--and couldn't hold them that long if there was another shootdown.

The only lie in this--since he wouldn't be saying that the President would choose to bomb in 48 hours if he didn't get them out (thus, not an ultimatum but a statement of fact: it wouldn't be the President's will, but forces beyond his control)--was there "could be" no quid pro quo, no deal. But maybe the "under this kind of pressure or threat" meant, "demanded by Soviets." So if U Thant asked it, the President was prepared to accede, even though his advisors wouldn't like that we were acknowledging an equality of status. It would be yielding to U Thant's concern for world peace, not to Khrushchev's definition of fairness (even though Kennedy shared that, which he didn't want to press against his advisors). (McG B, for example, clearly opposed this; and Thompson didn't think it necessary, and thought it would be taken as weakness).

The fact remains that JFK did go along with McG B and Thompson, et al, to the point of rejecting--privately, though not publicly--the Khrushchev's proposal of a trade. He didn't expect Khrushchev to accept this, after making a public demand: but he went further to make a threat he could hardly have discussed in the ExCom, and did not: that there were enough people in the ExCom, not only military but civilian, who wanted either to invade Cuba, or to strike the missiles, or to hit hard if a recon plane was shot down, or to risk TN war rather than to trade publicly, that he could not hold off military action very long unless Khrushchev conceded. And this may even have been realistic, a "statement of fact" --supported by the transcript--subject only to the qualification that Kennedy could avoid this outcome, if Khrushchev did not concede, by conceding himself, though at great political cost: and that he was, in fact, prepared to do this, though for bargaining purposes he denied this, or failed to suggest it. Even so, Khrushchev could have suggested it--refusing to believe, say, that Kennedy did not have the courage or the control to take this path to avoid war (and Khrushchev could have played the same tactic back, claiming that he himself could not afford to make such a concessions, which was, after all, much greater than he was asking of Kennedy, which was basically to acknowledge equality of status, not US

inferiority: admittedly a big change in the past status quo. This K could have done if only he had had a few hours to bargain; but he didn't, unknown to Kennedy. For Khrushchev, it wasn't a matter of losing control of his military forces "if" another plane was shot down or his adversary was adamant for another 24-48 hours. He had already lost control of his military forces, or of those of his ally; the only order he could give that could protect him (without certainty) from the consequences of his ally's determination to fire at invading aircraft was the order to start dismantling his missiles.

Blight conjectures that JFK feared loss of control of his own forces, effectively; and this is supported by the transcript (e.g., McNamara's description of the likely course of events). But there is only Russian evidence that RFK actually used this as a threat (though see Schlesinger on Nov 19: RFK threat to renew low-level reconnaissance, essentially a threat of loss of control to Castro and to the American military). Blight, rather, imagines that it led JFK to make a "concession" on the Turkish missiles--he repeated this on NPR today, October 23, despite our conversations--whereas the real point is that, despite his justified fear and his willingness to trade publicly--he actually refrained from doing this. (In this sense, he, like Khrushchev on October 27, had himself already lost control to the military and the hawks--who included some of the blockaders of the previous week, apparently including McNamara).

JFK must have felt, after 22-23 October, boxed in by his hawks and dawks and hoves. Having been tough, on 22-24 October, he wanted to prepare to trade; he wanted to be asked by the Turks to replace their IRBMS with Polaris, so he could trade the missiles in Turkey for the missiles in Cuba. (McNamara thought such a deal to be necessary; in fact, they would be lucky to get away without having to trade Guantanamo as well.) Yet it wasn't happening, partly because of the perceived attitudes of the Turks. His fury seems to have been, not a failure to get IRBMs out earlier (as RFK said, and others) but the failure during that week to even approach the Turks to get them to ask him out. (Note his strategy, reported by Schlesinger as well as by RFK to me: a) to get a coalition government in Vietnam, as in Laos, which would ask us out. And the Rusk letter: get U Thant to ask...since the Turks wouldn't, and since his own State people and Nitze wouldn't even approach the Turks to do this. (See my own sick feeling about this!) This was the insubordination he faced! (RFK: "He thought he was President." But RFK won't admit what JFK really wanted to do, or what he had been trying to set up that week.)

So as of October 27, the President found that what he regarded as an acceptable alternative to striking or invading Cuba and warring with the Soviet Union, was regarded as unacceptable by most of his advisors, not only the military but most of his civilians, including many of those counted as "doves" by the standards of the previous week (advocates of blockade as a

Pat proposes organization: Former Officials for a Democratic Foreign Policy. (hence, Against Covert Action). (A foreign policy that is democratically determined and that is compatible with constitutional democracy, not subversive of it and the negation of it). (This assumes that the public, if in control, would not permit the current content of Covert Action: assassinations, coups, death squads, terrorism, genocide, torture, kidnappings, etc.)

7) Soviet desires for, and desirable US acceptance of, parity of status, as basis for relationships. This is a major reason why right wing--all Republican candidates except Bush--are opposing the INF treaty (along with fact that it is a first step toward further disarmament, and legitimizes arms reductions). It promotes detente; and worse, detente on the basis of "equality". Right-wing says: "Why should we have to give up our necessary counterforce weapons, just to get them to give up weapons? They don't have a right to have any weapons anyway, as aggressors, an illegitimate regime, without legitimate interests to defend..." (As for arms race: "Who cares what weapons they have, so long as we have more?"

8) Once we accept equality of status with SU, we might even move in that direction with respect to smaller nations, even in Third World: e.g., the sovereignty of Nicaragua, Libya; the regional interests of Central American states, independent of ours, and their rights to initiatives in pursuit of these (Arias plan); the status of the World Court; UN peacekeeping forces (Gorbachev) rather than US unilateral action; non-intervention...

We might even question the ideological premise that the US has unique, special rights ("and obligations") and is bound by no law (even our own), one nation under the President, accountable to no one...

9) Instability as loss of control. Fears about Turkish and Cuban IRBMs, by McNamara, Khrushchev. Kunsan; Iwakuni; delegation; relation of SIOP-62 to pre-WWI mobilization plans (concern for "interference," leading to a single plan).

10) Why the Right Wing Hates the INF Accord: arms race, detente, equality, arms control/"trusting Russians"; but also, the INF proposals smoked out a mainline (e.g., Stanley Hoffman, Harvard School) attachment to instability as the basis of NATO defense: not just to "rational FU," with its backup of "not incredible FS capability," but vulnerability of forward-based forces providing "linkage": just as Cuba counted (with some misgivings) on IRBMs as providing protection, and a basis for SU commitment to their defense ("Nikita, Nikita...": fury at removal); and Turkey likewise. See Castro to Szulc on motives for accepting missiles. (And note: this came out of a US covert operation, threatening invasion: without this, Cuba wouldn't have been so willing to be a nuclear target and to provoke US domestic pressures toward

\CII\thesis

Draft: The Crisis of the Crisis

How Castro Won the Cuban Missile Crisis for Kennedy

With Comments on the Epistemology of Crisis History

Since 1964, on the basis of a nine months' study of nuclear crises centering on the Cuban Missile Crisis, drawing both on access to highly classified materials and on my own participation in the CMC, I have had an understanding of its circumstances that answers satisfactorily, for me, several of the major puzzles that still mark discussion of the affair after twenty-five years.

One of these, to be addressed here, concerns its resolution. Why did Khrushchev "fold," and why exactly when he did? Why did he accept, hours after they were proposed, terms sure to be perceived as coming close to total surrender, without holding fast at least long enough to probe further in the direction of the much more favorable settlement he had demanded only twenty-four hours earlier?

III - (1)
CII\OpEd.3
October 26, 1987
0300

Twenty-five years ago this morning, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev broadcast a message to President John F. Kennedy over Moscow radio agreeing--as proposed by Kennedy in a letter sent just the night before--to dismantle and remove Soviet surface-to-surface missiles from Cuba in return for a US pledge not to invade Cuba. He thus ended the Cuban Missile Crisis on American terms, as abruptly, and for American officials as unexpectedly, as it began. No one on the American side knew why.

Not one member of the ExComm--Executive Committee of the National Security Council, more than a dozen officials who had been advising the President almost continuously since the missiles on Cuba were discovered--had expected the Soviets to accept these terms so soon after they were proposed, if at all: without an American shot having been fired, and without any countermoves, threats, or other efforts to press further his demand ...

This included the hawks who were confident that the Soviets, outgunned, would accept without reprisal elsewhere the destruction of their missile sites on Cuba by American bombing. And it included the President and the small group of officials who were aware that the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in transmitting the President's letter with these terms to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin the night before, had

also passed on a carefully-limited promise, and a threat, amounting to an ultimatum. The promise--that American missiles in Turkey would be removed four to five months after removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba--was politically worthless to Khrushchev, because it was strictly conditioned on his keeping it secret, refraining ever from alluding to it as part of a deal or a quid pro quo. At the same time, by showing a willingness to discuss the Turkish missiles in this context, at least in private, it hinted that further Soviet pressure for a public exchange might be successful.

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The warning--not "an ultimatum but a statement of fact," RFK called it in his memoir, Thirteen Days--was that if the Soviet missiles were not removed promptly, they would be destroyed by a US airstrike. In 1964 Robert Kennedy told me, in the course of a highly classified interagency study I was conducting of communication between governments in nuclear crises, he had attached a deadline to the demand, "48 hours" (making the message, in fact, a classic ultimatum). But in the intense pace of the missile crisis, that allowed more than enough time for Khrushchev to pursue the public trade--which would have acknowledged an equality of status between the US and the Soviet Union, a major goal of Soviet foreign policy, anathema to American Cold Warriors--through counterproposals and threatening moves. This is what both Kennedy brothers expected, after delivering the package of proposals and warnings to Dobrynin. And such pressures might have won what he sought for Khrushchev.

Dean Rusk has now revealed (NYT, -----) that Kennedy had directed arrangements, if Khrushchev, as Kennedy expected, failed to accept his terms by the next day, to have U Thant, Secretary General of the UN, to reissue Khrushchev's call for a trade of Turkish and Cuban missiles in his own name, with the assurance that the US would accept it. RFK's "statement of fact," in other words, was a bluff. Khrushchev could not know that for sure, but he had good reason to guess it (including RFK's willingness to discuss the Turkish missiles in private, even though rejecting a public trade) and a half day's probing would have revealed it. The Soviets did not lack strong nerves; work on the Soviet missiles toward making them operational had proceeded at a "feverish" pace, night and day, in the face of Presidential warnings since October 22.

Yet within hours of RFK's talk with Dobrynin--between 1 and 3 AM in Cuba, a Soviet general told U Thant in Havana a few days later--the order to dismantle the missiles was received in Cuba. Dismantling began at 5 AM, and the message to Kennedy was broadcast--assuring faster transmission than diplomatic channels--about 9 AM EDT. Why the rush?

Fyodor Burlatsky, Khrushchev's speechwriter who drafted some of the private correspondence and Khrushchev's account of the crisis to the Presidium in December, described the mood of urgency surrounding that message in a conversation this month in Cambridge, where he was a guest of the Kennedy School. "They

were very, very nervous at this time," he told me. "The letter of October 28 was not drafted in the Kremlin, nor in the Politburo; it was drafted at Khrushchev's dacha, by a very small group. As soon as it was done, they ran with it to the radio station. That is to say, they sent it by car, very fast; in fact, the car had some trouble on the way, an obstruction, which delayed it. When it arrived, the manager of the station himself ran down the steps, snatched the message from the hands of the man in the car, and ran up the steps to broadcast it immediately. I never knew why they were so nervous."

845

There was good reason. Robert Kennedy had begun his discussion with Dobrynin, at 7:45 PM the previous evening, with a warning on the serious implications of the attacks that day on American reconnaissance planes overflying Cuba. Cuban antiaircraft artillery had been firing at low-flying planes, damaging at least one, and a surface-to-air rocket, presumed to be Soviet-manned, had downed a high-flying U-2 and killed its pilot, the first casualty of the confrontation. "...our photographic reconnaissance planes would have to continue to fly over Cuba," RFK told the Ambassador, as he recounts in his memoir, "and if the Cubans or Soviets shot at these planes, then we would have to shoot back." In his discussion with me in 1964, RFK was more specific; "If one more plane was destroyed," he told Dobrynin, "We would hit all the SAMs immediately, and probably the [surface-to-surface] missiles as well, and we would

III (5)

probably follow that with an invasion...So they had 48 hours to start getting their missiles out, unless they hit another recon plane before that, in which case the whole operation would get underway immediately."

1032

Khrushchev, receiving this deterrent warning shortly thereafter, knew something that the Kennedy brothers did not know, and which none of their advisors--as demonstrated by the transcript, recently released by Harvard, of the October 27 meetings of the ExComm--had guessed at as a possibility on that Saturday. He could not obey this warning, however desperately he might want to. He could not prevent antiaircraft artillery from attacking, and possibly destroying, one of the low-flying reconnaissance planes to be expected over Cuba the next day, perhaps as early as first light. Castro controlled that artillery; and with an independence that, the transcript shows, was unimagined by any of the ExComm members, caught in a Cold War stereotype of Soviet relations with a "satellite", he had ordered it to fire at planes invading Cuban airspace, regardless of the wishes of Soviet officials. As Castro put it to Tad Szulc, "It was we who gave the order to fire against the low-level flights...We had simply presented our viewpoint to [the Soviets], our opposition to the low-level flights, and we ordered our batteries to fire on them." (Fidel, p. 584)

There is even much testimony that the downing of the U-2 by

a Soviet SAM, which triggered JFK's commitment to retaliate on a large scale to any further shootdown and his secret ultimatum on the missiles, had occurred without and even against orders by Khrushchev and the Soviet high command. Burlatsky says this emphatically, claiming that Khrushchev had given precise orders that Soviet forces should not provoke or initiate any attacks and that he was "shocked" and apprehensive at the news of the shootdown. Khrushchev himself says this in his memoirs, where he attributes the shootdown of the U-2 to Cubans under Castro's orders, adding "At first we were concerned that President Kennedy wouldn't be able to stomach the humiliation." (554).

Exactly who, other than Khrushchev, directed the shootdown of the U-2, is still uncertain and controversial. Burlatsky told me he remains "absolutely certain" it was Castro; his colleague Mikoyan believes it was a Soviet officer, acting insubordinately; Robert Shakne of CBS reported the latter view from a defecting Cuban air force general; Castro himself took credit in speaking to U Thant immediately after the event (and, off-the-record, to Frank Mankiewicz, Saul Landau and Kirby Jones in 1974), and a Soviet general told U Thant it was "a Cuban colonel"; but Castro denied Cuban control to Tad Szulc more recently. And in my 1964 study I came across recent intelligence--the basis for which has been revealed this month by Seymour Hersh (Washington Post, October 11)--that Soviet forces had been engaged in a serious firefight, suffering 18 casualties, on the night of October 26 in the vicinity of the SAM site from which the U-2 was struck the

next morning, possibly while the site was under the control of the Soviet unit's adversaries, whose nationality was unidentified but whom the intelligence analysts presumed to be Cubans.

Again, the October 27 transcript reveals no guess by anyone of any of these possibilities; another stereotype prevailed, of iron control by the Soviet high command over Soviet forces and weaponry, precluding any such hypothesis. Indeed, the fact that the SAM was presumed to be Soviet-manned (though NSA had learned of mixed Soviet-Cuban crews by this time, Hersh reports) led to the unquestioned interpretation of the shootdown as a deliberate escalation, directed by Khrushchev himself. Hence the President's turn to an ultimatum, and personal warning, transmitted by his brother, against shooting down any further recon planes. Transmitted to the wrong party. For whoever shot down the U-2 on Saturday morning, Khrushchev could have had considerable confidence that the Soviet chain of command could prevent further attacks on the high-flying planes, which could not be reached by Cuban antiaircraft (unless forced down to lower altitude by malfunction or damage from a SAM, either of which might have occurred on Saturday's shootdown). But he could not prevent at all the destruction of a low-flying plane, which would be enough to trigger the destruction of Soviet SAMs and probably his missiles as well.

What Khrushchev faced early Sunday morning (Moscow time) was not a 48-hour ultimatum but a 12-hour ultimatum. Unless he

announced the immediate dismantling of the missiles in Cuba, he could well lose them, with heavy Soviet casualties, soon after low-flying planes flew over Cuba at first light. There was no time for explanations about Cuban responsibility (which would not, probably, have halted US reconnaissance or massive reprisal for Cuban attacks) or for further probes or threats. Loss of control of events, and even of Soviet/Cuban forces, was not a future contingency to be feared; it was already a reality.

And the same was true for the US; Presidential undertakings, ignorant of the true state of control on the other side, had made US operations blindly responsive to initiatives by the Cubans. Between them, the two superpower leaders had contrived to pass the trigger to World War III to Fidel Castro: aged 35, intensely nationalistic, macho, threatened with direct attack, feeling humiliated both by his adversary and his ally, uncalculating of the consequences of his actions to vindicate Cuban sovereignty: not, in short, an easy man to coerce or deter, even if US threats had been correctly addressed to him: nor easy for his superpower ally to control, although that ally's forces were hostage to his initiatives. And in either respect, not unlike the current leaderships of Iraq and Iran, in a region where US naval forces have taken on a deterrent mission like that of Soviet missile forces in Cuba.

1948

Khrushchev's position on the morning of October 28, 1962 was not an enviable one (nor was that of the US, though it was less aware of it.

\CII\oped.3
Outline, draft II
25 October 1987

Expanded briefly
--25 years ago this morning, K accepted American terms, abruptly.
--No American knew why. Members of the ExCom were astonished at the abruptness; not one had expected K to accept these terms so soon after they were proposed, if at all, without pressing further his demand just the day before to trade the removal of Soviet missiles from Cuba for the removal of US missiles from Turkey, and without an American shot having been fired. (A day after an American UO2 had been shot down, evidently by a Soviet SAM, and the Soviets had demanded that US missiles be withdrawn from Turkey as the price of removing Soviet missiles from Cuba, along with respective no-invasion pledges. Then on Sunday the 25th, no mention of Turkey, a promise of inspection: which Castro, furious at not being consulted by the Soviets on this or on the removal, repudiated, invalidating the conditional US promise of no-invasion which had been the only slender quid pro quo offered by the US.) Why the sudden turnaround?

COT?
--Because RFK accompanied the American terms with a strong statement that a deal on Turkey would not be acceptable, and a warning that if another recon plane were shot down by Cubans or Soviets, ... More planes would be coming tomorrow, RFK said.

Then what?
~~And K did not control the antiaircraft.~~ *Expanded*

U2 shooting not ordered by K. Cuban missile artillery shooting at recon plane
--Theme: Learning from Khrushchev. When the antiaircraft started firing Saturday morning, Khrushchev discovered what American analysts have not recognized to this day: Cuba was not just a geographical arena for a big power confrontation, Cubans were playing an independent role. It was in part a Cuban missile crisis after all. ~~At that point Khrushchev might well have opted but, he was already bracing for an American retaliation to the U-2 that had been shot down: and that not by his order, he says in a little-noticed passage in his memoirs:~~

"Castro gave an order to open fire, and the Cubans shot down an American U-2 reconnaissance plane. Thus another American spy, just like Gary Powers, was downed by one of our missiles." (554)

K's shocked + apprehensive
Two recent Soviet visitors to Harvard's Kennedy School of Government, Sergei Mikoyan and Fyodor Burlatsky, though they disagree with each other as to whether Castro or an insubordinate Soviet officer gave the order to fire the SAM, strongly confirm Khrushchev's account that it was not by his command or that of the Soviet High Command. Burlatsky (who told me that he was "absolutely certain that it was by Castro's order") was Khrushchev's speech writer and drafter of Khrushchev's "first letter" on Friday night and later of his account of the crisis to the Presidium on December 12; he emphasized that Khrushchev had given precise orders not to be provocative, not to initiate attacks, and that he was "shocked" by the action and apprehensive. As Khrushchev puts it in his memoirs, "At first we were concerned that President Kennedy wouldn't be able to stomach

the humiliation."

Nevertheless, despite the firing by Castro's artillerymen, on Castro's independent command in defiance of Khrushchev's wishes to avoid provocation, both morning and afternoon at low-flying American reconnaissance planes (at least one of which was damaged), Khrushchev chose to wait till he had a reply from the Americans to the letter he had just sent, asserting a Turkey-Cuba parallel--reflecting, more significantly, a US-Soviet equality of status, which may have been his major goal to achieve and which most American officials preferred to risk war rather than to acknowledge-- and demanding a comparable withdrawal from Turkey "of the weapons you call offensive" if Soviet weapons were to be withdrawn from Cuba.

He had reason to hope for this; for the secretly-recorded transcript of the ExCom sessions of October 27, just now made public by the Kennedy School, show that--contrary to all previously-published accounts--the President himself regarded such a trade as "reasonable" and preferable to the risks of military action to remove the Soviet missiles.

...the letter he had just sent. This involved risks; Castro's gunners continued to shoot at low-flying planes in the afternoon, and damaged at least one. Fortunately for all, as Castro told Tad Szulc in 1984, "the inexperience of our artillerymen, who had recently learned to operate these pieces, probably made them miss as they fired on the low-flying aircraft," (584, Fidel); ~~though at least one plane was hit~~. But ~~when he learned from RFK that his demand for a public trade was rejected--~~ "There could be no deal, no quid pro quo"--^{one} that reconnaissance ^{com}would continue despite Cuban objections ~~(no surprise)~~ and that there would be no further American restraint on retaliation, ~~he opted rapidly out of the game of Cuban roulette without waiting for another spin of the chamber.~~ *slightly upset*

5. 1
As Rusk has revealed, if he could have stood the tension one more day, crossing his fingers that Cuban gunners would continue to miss, ~~he might have won the contest. Should he have done so?~~ The American Joint-Chiefs of Staff (my 1964 notes reveal) decided tentatively on 28 October "to schedule 4 low-level reconnaissance flights for late afternoon, and that aircraft would fly through any fire encountered (sic)". ~~Such flights were cancelled by President Kennedy only after receiving Khrushchev's capitulation (of which the Chiefs expressed skepticism: they decided to draw the attention of subordinate commanders to the latest Khrushchev message, which the JCS thought "might be an insincere proposal intended to gain time.")~~ In Castro's opinion, perhaps over-confident, "I am absolutely certain that if the low-level flights had been resumed, we would have shot down one, two or three of these planes...with so many batteries firing, we would have shot down some planes. I don't know whether this would have started a nuclear war." | ~~Khrushchev chose not to find out. There may be something to learn from this.~~

Whole world held hostages to Cuba - us not knowing
the risks of brinkmanship - of Kennedy, against his better judgment because of
memorable pressure from his circle holding to an ultimatum he knew he was willing to retract.

Khrushchev's position was not enviable at that moment, and he had only himself to blame for making his own forces and national prestige hostage to the uncalculating pride and initiatives of a desperate, embattled and uncontrolled ally. He opted out of the game of Cuban roulette.
Have we managed to escape such a dangerous situation? Are we not in it right now? For the Soviet Union in 1962, read the US today; for the US then, Iran; for Cuba, Iraq/Kuwait. There are differences of course, as always, but they are not all reassuring. Not only our forces but our citizens are exposed to retaliation from Iran for initiatives by Iraq and Kuwait; our lack of control over these and other neutrals we are protecting is dramatised by their unwillingness to give us support facilities in the area, and by the loss of one destroyer so far to Iraqi attack, under as-yet-unexplained circumstances. As for coercing or deterring Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini does not present the model of prudent, calculating rationality that crisis managers prefer in their opponents. And is he in total control of Revolutionary Guard gunboats? Who exactly are "they" in President Reagan's assurance, after the latest exchange: "There isn't going to be any war; they're not that dumb"? Can we be sure that his advisors will remember to ask that question when the next attack occurs? The Best and Brightest under Kennedy did not, on October 27, 1962.

It is hard to believe that Reagan lacks advisors who see these risks; but easy to believe that most or all of these are still more impressed with the risks of "cutting and running", showing indecisiveness by abandoning a misbegotten policy, admitting error by changing course. With very few exceptions, editorial writers and members of Congress have proclaimed that, however foolish it was to get involved, we "cannot afford" to remove our "protection," above all precipitately or prematurely, i.e., before any more violent exchanges. Many of these same helpful commentators must have taken the same position just before, and even after, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon. Reagan and his key aides, to their great credit, rose above these doubts, these demands to "stay the course" with a disastrous policy, as decisively as Kennedy in his refusal to invest American forces in the invasion of Cuba after the failure of the Bay of Pigs. Who now wishes we had "soldiered on" in Lebanon, or retaliated to the bombing of the Marine barracks, or sent in more Marines?

Khrushchev heard the same advice. A few months after the crisis ended, he told Norman Cousins that the people around him had sought to steer him away from any action that would be a confession of weakness.

"When I asked the military advisers if they could assure me that holding fast would not result in the death of five hundred million human beings, they looked at me as though I was out of mind, or, what was worse, a traitor...The biggest tragedy, as they saw it, was not that our country might be devastated and

everything lost, but that the Chinese or the Albanians would accuse us of appeasement or weakness. So I said to myself: 'To hell with these maniacs. If I can get the United States to assure me that it will not attempt to overthrow the Cuban government, I will remove the missiles.' That is what happened. And so now I am being reviled by the Chinese and the Albanians. They say I was afraid to stand up to a paper tiger. It is all such nonsense. What good would it have done me in the last hour of my life to know that though our great nation and the United States were in complete ruins, the national honor of the Soviet Union was intact?"

related to an anti-offense

Should we disdain learning from this adversary, on the grounds that he was a loser, or that we are so much stronger today than he was then? But what he responded to on October 28, 1962, twenty-five years ago today, had nothing at all to do with the balance of forces. ~~Neither the Soviet Union, nor the world,~~ would have been any safer then from the risk of a disastrous war--whether or not it stopped short of total holocaust--if the Soviet Union had already misinvested the trillion dollars that Brezhnev spent to attain strategic parity, as a misguided lesson of the Missile Crisis. For the trigger to the unleashing of US forces had been passed--by the blind undertakings of both leaderships--to Cuban artillerymen under Castro, who in turn was ignorant of the power he was wielding and of the likely consequences of his acting to vindicate offenses to his nationalism and machismo. (It should also be said that of the three leaders who created this situation, only Castro ever admitted he had been wrong in the risks he took).

*see 2000
RFK, 531*

Explaining his abrupt decision to remove his weapons from dangers to which he should never have exposed them, Khrushchev told the Presidium in December: "A smell of scorching hung in the air." That warning scent drifts on the wind today, from the direction of the Persian Gulf.

CII\oped.2
25 October 1987
Outline and draft of oped

On 25th, K ended crisis. No American knew why. No one expected, from hawk to dove, it would end so soon, or end that way, with a Soviet capitulation without Americans having fired a shot. Nor has any explanation been offered since.

Diverse information revealed only this month, in observance of the 25th anniversary, provides a sufficient answer to that puzzle, bearing on what K probably feared if he did not settle immediately; and bears on some other questions: What would probably have happened if K had not? What were the risks of war? (Was Kennedy wrong? How consistent were his actual actions with his--correct--high assessment of the risk?) How valid were various assessments of the risks of war, and how did proposals and actual decisions conform to these assessments? The answers are not reassuring about the risks in the Persian Gulf today, where American and Soviet warships, so far, coexist uneasily, but where attack can come, as the Stark found, from "friendly" forces or by mines of unknown origin, and both confront loosely-controlled forces of half a dozen nations whose motivations are unknown and relationships shifting and shadowy.

Bring in:

--JCS, 28 October, on recon planes, and tac nucs

--JFK on uncertainty as to SAM; but assumption of escalation, if SAM; SAM vs. artillery; but lack of doubt as to control of AA. Taylor/JFK reasons for sending more recon.

--McCone on ultimatum on recon; Decision, no U2 but low-level; McN on hitting SAMs (pres was not looking for an excuse to hit SAMs\; sent RFK with warning). (RFK had other things to say that evening, which drew more attention when revealed publicly in 1968; but it may be what he had to say on recon had most impact. (US failure to respond would not be repeated, nor recon called off; nor would public trade be acceptable, only private trade and no-invasion pledge...otherwise US airstrike in 48 hours, even if no recon hit).

--Fulbright recommendation: invade, don't blockade: in assumption that risks would less, confronting Cubans; actually, not just 3500 Soviets estimated by 22 October, or the 10,000 estimated later in the week--armed with FROGS (revealed by low-level recon)--but at least 22,000: Mikoyan says 40,000. So we didn't know as of 27 October what forces we would actually encounter if we invaded!

--JCS recommendation, after U2, on Oct 27: tac nucs, low level recon.

--Castro to Mank, Szulc, on AA

--Burlatsky on nervousness, as surrender message sent.

--Burlatsky, Mikoyan: K hadn't authorized the shooting; very

concerned over reaction.

--K: "A smell of scorching hung in the air." To those educated by new information on the past, that warning scent drifts on the wind today, from the direction of the Persian Gulf.

--Reagan: "There will be no war, because the Iranians are not that dumb."

--Hawks in 1962 were confident that war would not go beyond Cuba, because Khrushchev was rational, responsible and outgunned. Kennedy and McNamara were not so sure. (Still less, for McNamara, after Vietnam). Yet they postponed settling on Khrushchev's terms, even though JFK personally found them reasonable; McNamara even favored hitting the SAMs the next day, on the "assumption," though evidence was inconclusive, that Soviets had destroyed our U-2 (as when he recommended hitting North Vietnam on August 4 on inconclusive evidence--sufficient for CINCPAC--that Vietnamese had attacked our destroyer). (Not only had he not learned better in Cuba, he missed the difference between threats and actual attacks when it came to influencing an opponent; it may well be that Khrushchev would not, could not, have backed down if McNamara's desire to signal with bombs on 27-28 October had been followed, rather than RFK's ultimatum.)

Then as now, hawks did not assume that our opponent would back down without our firing a shot (they were amazed, and are still puzzled, that that is what he did); their confidence in violent coercive tactics was that our adversary, though malign, was rational, totally in control of his forces, carefully calculating, prudent, and outgunned. It is not clear that Reagan believes any of these things, except the last, about the Ayatollah Khomeini, nor should he. Yet even his critics tend to say, "We were unwise to involve our prestige and our military forces in the Persian Gulf; but now that we are there, we cannot pull out... yet."

Some of these were saying the same to Reagan before, and even after, the bombing of the Marine barracks in Lebanon; fortunately, he didn't listen then. He "cut and ran"--and paid no price at all in the next year's election--and who now thinks he should have "stayed the course" or sent in more Marines? Khrushchev got this advice in 1962 from his own subordinates: Cousins quote. He got out fast, when he saw he was losing control. If he had waited, he might have won, and kept his job. Should he have waited, a few more hours: crossing his fingers while Castro fired at our planes?

Aside from Reagan's touching confidence that Iranian leaders--perhaps the moderates he sought to strengthen with his arms trades--are not dumb enough to blunder into war, can he be sure that they are totally in control of Revolutionary Guard gunboats, or even missile crews? Is this question being asked? The Best and the Brightest under Kennedy were not less astute than the current crisis managers, but they failed to ask it in 1962, and some who had a real sense of high risk failed to

reflect it in the threats they sponsored. In fact, the same men, now working under Johnson, acted two years later on the assumption that Hanoi totally controlled the actions of the NLF and, even more dubiously, that Russia could determine Hanoi's policies. (This was more true under Nixon). We cannot count on men in the Pentagon or White House or State to appraise the uncertainties realistically or to act on them prudently when they do. That is why a War Powers Act--preferably much strengthened, and certainly enforced--is needed, to bring the Congressional role in the nuclear age much closer to what the Constitution wisely intended. It is the case for closing out a misbegotten policy fast, before civilian control is lost and "the laws of war" takes over utterly, as Khrushchev did 25 years ago.

AHA! The moral for today is: act like Khrushchev, in a situation as fraught with disaster, as unpredictable and ill-controlled as the Cuban Crisis was on October 28, and the Persian Gulf is today. Khrushchev was right--was he not?--even though had he followed his advisors he might have won the crisis and kept his job: if Castro's gunners had missed again. Were Kennedy's advisors right--granted that they did win, and that Kennedy would have lost if he had ignored them? Would it have been better to have tested what the hawks believed, that battle could have been joined and the outcome would have been a success by prewar standards, because the Soviets would have capitulated and withdrawn from combat before our losses exceeded the rewards of winning?

Those who thought the risks were low counted on Khrushchev's willingness to back down when he saw that the US was resolute, knowing that he was outgunned. But the real victory was achieved before any shots were fired by the US--it might not have been achievable otherwise--and it did not reflect the balance of forces: Khrushchev would have expected an American reaction to further loss of American forces even if he had strategic superiority or parity; and he could not prevent further loss of American forces, because he could not control Castro, despite Castro's economic and military dependence on the Soviet Union. (Conceivably, if he had had superiority, he could have "forbidden" the US to undertake any more recon, even against their neighbor and even after they had committed themselves, on pain of being shot down).

Today, as then, the President is confronted almost unanimously with advice (now, from outside the Executive branch) to stay the course, don't get out or change course precipitately (as both leaders were in the Cuban Missile Crisis); Kennedy, against his personal judgment, took their advice, and won; Khrushchev ignored them, in the end (though at that point, they all may have come around to his view, after RFK's warning and rejection of their hardline proposal) and grasped defeat. He lost his job--though he would not likely have done better if he

had persisted and war had resulted--and might have won had he stayed in: but was he wrong or right to get out? Are our odds really better in the Persian Gulf? Are we even in a position to judge? (If the answer to the latter question is "no," we should get out: not "later," not "when we can do it safely and gracefully," not "when the costs of getting out are less.")

I was saying this in 1969. Was I wrong? My advice was not followed, nor Goodell's, nor McGovern-Hatfield's for years. When it was, years later, the results were not altogether happy (though not worse, in Vietnam, than I had feared). Should we have stayed on? Were we right not to have gotten out earlier?

What might have happened if Khrushchev had delayed accepting Kennedy's terms for another day, either remaining silent or making countermoves and threats, pressing his own earlier demands? Rusk reveals that Kennedy had prepared the option of accepting Khrushchev's terms on Sunday, with the mediation of U Thant, if Khrushchev had not accepted his own. So Khrushchev might have won. And this might have happened even if US recon planes had been shot down, as Castro expected. History would have been very different.

But Khrushchev foresaw another possible course: US recon shot at and downed, a large US strike against all SAMS and probably the SSMS too, followed by US invasion: which would have engaged 20-40,000 Soviet troops (put aside the question of whether they had tactical nuclear warheads with them! US authorities would probably be skeptical that the Soviets could have been so incautious as to send such warheads with their troops; but then, they didn't expect them to send troops or missiles, either, and we don't know to this day whether warheads for the missiles had been sent...). Could he have managed to say then, to the Soviet generals demanding a counterstrike in Berlin or Turkey, "To hell with these maniacs" and defied them, accepting a wartime defeat? What would it have taken, then, before one leader or the other accepted to be called coward, failure, traitor, by his own subordinates and allies?

By the night of the 27th, even his concession could not surely avoid this course of events; and nothing else that he could do could even reduce the probability of it, which was high. He did the only thing he could do to avoid it, and he was not wrong.

That moment of truth, for those who have a nose for the smell of scorching, is not sometime in the future of our involvement in the Persian Gulf. It was yesterday, last month, last week; it is not later than now.

first move, rather than air strike).. Unlike himself, they preferred to risk war, or even to strike Cuba, than to make this concession: and admit equal status to the Soviet Union, abandoning a major premise of the Cold War, and risking our hegemony in NATO.

They did not convince him, or make him give up his willingness to trade, let alone make him willing to go to war. Why then did he risk war one more day, giving in to their approach, making their demands on Russia, on Saturday? Probably (a) because he underestimated the risks of doing this, overestimating the effects of his warning on recon to Khrushchev, not realizing that K did not control the antiaircraft and perhaps not even the SAMS, not realizing that he was warning the wrong party (whereas the party really in control of the AA, Castro, could almost surely not be deterred at that point); (b) because just before election, he could not afford the risk of a major break within the ExCom or a leak: e.g., from the JCS, of his true attitude. If he had had to accept U Thant's proposal, still worse if he accepted Khrushchev's, he would have anticipated disaster in the election, with leaks from his ExCom or JCS or even open denunciation from some of them: he had some Republicans in there, starting with McCone, but including nominally, Dillon, Lovett, Nitze, and still more hawks. As it was, according to Schlesinger he was not sanguine about the effects of his failure to dislodge Castro on the election, though there he was too pessimistic.

CII\oped.2
24 October 1987
Outline of oped on CII

Why did Khrushchev fold his hand in the CMC: so fast, on American terms?

Why didn't he postpone his acceptance by half a day or more, make counteroffers, press for a public trade, make counterthreats?

What would have happened if he had?

What were the risks of war? How close did it come?

What lessons could be drawn for the risks of war today?
What raises them, how to lower them?

What standard "lessons" of the CMC are wrong, in the light of this explanation and the evidence it rests on?

What newly revealed information bears on these questions?

On last question: -

--My interview with RFK

--Castro to Mankiewicz and Szulc, on antiaircraft

--Burlatsky on "nervousness"

--Burlatsky and Mikoyan: SAM unauthorized

--Mikoyan: insubordinate Soviet

--Burlatsky: Cuban, Castro

--Statsenko, Castro, Khrushchev: Cuban

--Castro to Szulc: Soviet

--Firefight (according to Hersh, multiple sources;

--Different possibilities: SAM, AA, mixed crews

--Khrushchev: Chinese and Albanians

--smell of scorching

--Persian Gulf

--October 27 transcript

--lack of guess about Cuban independence

--lack of guess about SAM unauthorized

--JFK ready to make "fair" trade; "over-ruled" by his advisors (NOTE: a) as Excom guessed about Khrushchev, with respect to 27 October letter demanding trade; d b) as RFK is said by Russians--Gromyko/Dobrynin, Khrushchev--to have warned about JFK: transcript supports this (both his differing from consensus, his yielding, basis for fear of political costs if he defies others); even, some military insubordination (SAC U-2, SAC alert; what about story of planes on way to Cuba, Seattle paper?))

--McCone suggestion of ultimatum on recon

--subsequent secrecy, lies, about JFK position

--bearing on (mis-reporting of) October 26 letter; JFK anger relating to Turkish missiles; Bobby "ploy"; Bobby attitude on State draft; relation of RFK/Dobrynin talk to State draft; JFK tristesse after victory, his feelings as to whether he should have given in to advisors (even though he won thereby): would wrong lessons be learned as a results?; yes; had he had a right to blockade, given that his advisors had proven so adamant against a peaceful, compromise solution once confrontation was in progress, difficulty he had getting out without war (i.e., did his own advisors end up scaring him? Not only the military. Maybe he was able to "admit" this to Dobrynin--to strengthen threat, make it other than an ultimatum, appeal to him to help JFK against his own hawks, and JFK would help K likewise: recall Ho Chi Minh to Sainteny in 1946, Give me something to go back with; others are harder than I am; if it comes to a fight...Jackie told this to JFK, recalled it in 1972...But in this case it was the stronger appealing to the weaker, Let me Win: my colleagues demand it, see it as our right; if you don't give it, I will have to kill ten of yours for one of ours...in the end, we are both dead...This is what Khrushchev complained of in Vienna: You capitalists know how to make subtle threats...

\CII\oped.4
26 October 1987
1000

*On Sunday morning
October 28, 1962*

Twenty five years ago this ^{week} morning, Moscow radio began broadcasting a message to President John F. Kennedy from Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev agreeing--as proposed by Kennedy in a letter sent just the night before--to remove Soviet surface-to-surface missiles from Cuba in return for nothing more than a conditional US pledge (~~soon thrown into question~~) not to invade the island. Thus Khrushchev ended the Cuban Missile Crisis on American terms, as abruptly, and for American officials as unexpectedly, as it began.

For the last quarter century, American analysts of the crisis have found the suddenness of ^{Khrushchev's} his concession on October 28, 1962 as inexplicable as did the President and his advisors then: coming as it did on the heels of "black Saturday," when tougher demands for a parallel removal of US missiles from Turkey were accompanied by ground fire ^{from} rockets and antiaircraft at American reconnaissance planes, and Soviet efforts to make the missiles operational continued furiously all day and into the night.

174

For some in Moscow, too, the ^{feelings} sense of urgency was more evident than the reasons for it. Fyodor Burlatsky, Khrushchev's speechwriter, who drafted his ~~long-secret, conciliatory "first letter" Friday night~~, and later, drafted his account of the crisis to the Presidium, was in Cambridge this month as a guest of the Kennedy School of Government. "They were very, very nervous at this time," he told me, ~~in a conversation over breakfast~~, speaking of the drafters of the October 28 message, with whom ~~he said~~ he had been in close touch. *Some of his private letters to Kennedy*

"This letter was not drafted in the Kremlin, nor in the Politburo. It was drafted at Khrushchev's dacha, by a very small group. As soon as it was done, they ran it to the radio station. That is to say, they sent it by car, very fast; as a matter of fact, the car ran into some trouble on the way, an obstruction, which delayed it. When it arrived, the manager of the station himself ran down the steps, ~~very excited~~, snatched the message from the hands of the man in the car, and ran up the steps to broadcast it immediately." He never knew, Burlatsky said, why they felt in such a hurry.

376

In fact, there was good reason. Part of that I learned from Robert Kennedy in 1964, in the course of a highly classified interagency study I was conducting of communication between governments in nuclear crises. The relevant part of what he told me of his message to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin in the evening of Saturday, October 27, 1962 had been known at the time to only a

\CII\OpEd.4
October 26, 1987
0300

Twenty-five years ago this morning, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev broadcast a message to President John F. Kennedy over Moscow radio agreeing--as proposed by Kennedy in a letter sent just the night before--to dismantle and remove Soviet surface-to-surface missiles from Cuba in return for a US pledge not to invade Cuba. He thus ended the Cuban Missile Crisis on American terms, as abruptly, and for American officials as unexpectedly, as it began. No one on the American side knew why.

Not one member of the ExComm--^{the} Executive Committee of the National Security Council, more than a dozen officials who had been advising the President almost continuously since the missiles on Cuba were discovered--had expected the Soviets to accept these terms so soon after they were proposed, if at all: (without an American shot having been fired, and without any countermeasures, threats, or other efforts to press further his demand ...)

*what
KS attempted.
What he does
is, perhaps...
Rush was
amused...*

This included the hawks who were confident that the Soviets, outgunned, would accept without reprisal elsewhere the destruction of their missile sites on Cuba by American bombing. And it included the President and the small group of officials who were aware that the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in transmitting the President's letter with these terms to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin the night before, had also passed on a carefully-limited promise, and a threat, amounting to an ultimatum. The promise--that American missiles in Turkey would be removed four to five months after removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba--was politically worthless to Khrushchev, because it was strictly conditioned on his keeping it secret, refraining ever from alluding to it as part of a deal or a quid pro quo. At the same time, by showing a willingness to discuss the Turkish missiles in this context, at least in private, it hinted that further Soviet pressure for a public exchange might be successful.

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He told me, in somewhat more detail than he later made public in his 1968 memoir, Thirteen Days, that at the direction of his brother,

handful of officials along with the President; and they had not grasped its significance in the resolution of the crisis, any more than Robert Kennedy did in 1964, in the absence of some other data some of which did not become known to Americans till well after the posthumous publication of RFK's memoir, Thirteen Days, in 1968.]

495

At 7:45 in the evening of Saturday, October 27, 1962, ^{he} Robert Kennedy began a secret discussion at the Justice Department with Soviet Ambassador Anatoli Dobrynin by impressing on him the serious implications of the attacks that day on American aircraft. Cuban antiaircraft artillery had been firing at low-flying planes, damaging at least one, and a surface-to-air missile (SAM), presumed to be Soviet-manned, had downed a U-2 flying higher than the artillery could reach, causing the first fatality of the crisis. ^

"Our photographic reconnaissance planes would have to continue to fly over Cuba," RFK reports he told the Ambassador, in his memoir, "and if the Cubans or Soviets shot at these planes, then we would have to shoot back." In his discussion with me in 1964, Kennedy was more specific. "If one more plane was destroyed," he said he had told Dobrynin, "we would hit all the SAMs immediately, and probably the [surface-to-surface] missiles as well, and we would probably follow that with an invasion."

656

~ 165
RFK went on to convey a further warning that if the missiles were not removed promptly--starting within "48 hours," he told me--they would be removed by an American airstrike, followed probably by invasion. That defined a classic ultimatum, though RFK preferred to call it, to Dobrynin, "a statement of fact." It gave the Soviets 24 hours or more--unless, as RFK emphasized to me, they hit another recon plane, "in which case the whole operation would commence immediately"--for counterproposals and threats pressing for American public concessions on the missiles in Turkey. That renewed pressure is what the Kennedy brothers mainly expected; and Dean Rusk has just publicly disclosed (NYT August 28) that JFK was secretly prepared give in on this issue rather than go to war. So Khrushchev could have won the contest if he had delayed his response a few more hours on Sunday; except that...

RFK went on to give a 48-hour ultimatum on removing the missiles from Cuba (^{essentially} even if no more recon planes were hit), and a flat rejection of a public trade of US missiles in Turkey. The Kennedys expected both of these propositions to be probed by Soviet counterproposals and delaying moves on Sunday, in which case, Dean Rusk has recently revealed (NYT August 28) they would have been found to be bluffs; Kennedy was prepared, rationally, to make the public trade rather than go to war.

But the prior warning against hitting recon planes was very obviously no bluff. It was meant simply to buy time for

Sunday's
(Kennedy cancelled ~~the~~ U-2 flight as too dangerous

negotiation by preventing any more American casualties among the low-flying reconnaissance planes scheduled for the next day. But it almost surely ~~did more than~~ ^{intended} ~~that~~ ^{for} reason the President and his advisors ^{reason that} did not know; a transcript of the White House meetings of October 27, released by Harvard just last week, reveals that no American participant imagined ~~it~~ even as a possibility.]

Very simply, the deterrent warning was directed to the wrong party. Khrushchev was not in control of Cuban antiaircraft artillery, which had begun firing on Saturday morning on Castro's direct orders and in defiance of Soviet wishes to avoid provoking American retaliation.

989

As Castro put it to Tad Szulc in 1984 (as earlier, to Frank Mankiewicz, Saul Landau and Kirby Jones in 1974): "It was we who gave the order to fire against the low-level flights...We had simply presented our viewpoint to [the Soviets], our opposition to low-level flights, and we ordered our batteries to fire on them." (Szulc, Fidel, 584).

1048

A transcript of the October 27 meetings of the Presidential advisors during the crisis, released at Harvard just last week, shows that this independent action by the Cubans was not guessed by anyone even as a possibility. Nor was the possibility imagined that the SAM firing that killed the U-2 pilot Major Anderson was against the orders of Khrushchev and the Soviet high command: as Burlatsky, along with many others in past years, emphatically asserted this month. Cold War stereotypes of the iron control by Soviet leaders over their subordinates and their satellites precluded such hypotheses. As a result, both layers of antiaircraft firing were interpreted, without any question or dissent, by the President's advisors as a deliberate escalation, a change of orders from Khrushchev himself; and the President was led to commit himself, to deter further, irreversible escalation, to two explicit ultimatums, one on antiaircraft fire and one on missiles.

1198

Whoever directed the SAM to shoot down the U-2--and this remains uncertain, ~~and controversial~~, except that it almost surely was not Khrushchev, ^{contrary to what} as Presidential advisors had assumed without question--that act had triggered a ^{secret} Presidential ultimatum, ~~sent secretly via his brother~~, promising immediate and large-scale reprisal against Soviet SAMs and probably missiles if Cubans shot down a low-flying reconnaissance plane. ~~And Khrushchev would~~ ^{did not have} the power to stop the Cubans.

Thus
The critical threat that Khrushchev faced ~~on~~ Sunday morning (Moscow time) October 28 was not a 48-hour ultimatum but, in effect, a 12-hour ultimatum, ~~framed unwittingly~~ by the Kennedy brothers. Unless he announced the immediate dismantling of the

posed without knowing it

and were fired on by Cuban gunners
whom he had no power to stop.

^{another} missiles in Cuba--which ^{could} ~~would probably~~ dissuade US attacks even if a recon plane were hit--he could well lose his missiles and SAMs, with heavy Soviet casualties and the likelihood of further escalation, soon after low-flying planes flew over Cuba on Sunday, perhaps at first light. He had lost control of events; he could regain it, in part, only by getting Soviet offensive forces out of Cuba. The order to dismantle the missiles arrived in Cuba, Between one and three AM--a few hours after RFK's meeting with Dobrynin--and the dismantling began at 5 AM. The race to the radio station was a few hours later. ^{with the announcement - diplomatic channels would be too slow -}

Not much too soon. Meeting at 9 AM Sunday morning, about the time that Moscow radio began its broadcast, the Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed "Tentatively to schedule 4 low-level recon flights for late afternoon, and that aircraft would fly through any fire encountered." (The President cancelled these flights only after Khrushchev's concession was received). In Castro's opinion, "I am absolutely certain that if the low-level flights had been resumed, we would have shot down one, two or three of these planes...with so many batteries firing, we would have shot down some planes. I don't know whether this would have started a nuclear war." (Szulc, Fidel, p. 585)
1527

by 1964
it's record
from 1964
o Tad
Szulc,

As it worked out, Castro did not start a war; instead, he lost the missile crisis for Khrushchev, who chose, wisely, to back out from what he discovered was Cuban roulette without awaiting one more day's spin of the chamber, even though it might have brought him a victory.

^{with luck,}
^{But} ^{supposedly prudent, calculating} If it was indeed, in the end, a Cuban crisis after all, it was the leaders of the two superpowers who had between them, without enough foresight, contrived to put the trigger to World War III in the unwitting hands of Fidel Castro. For reasons he never knew in detail, John F. Kennedy's estimate during the crisis of the odds on general war--"between one in three and even"--does not seem too high.

Explaining his abrupt decision to remove his forces from dangers to which he should never have exposed them, Khrushchev said later, "A smell of scorching hung in the air."

To those informed by such experience, that warning scent drifts on the wind today, from the direction of the Persian Gulf.

1700

Khrushchev paid a heavy political price, at home and abroad, for his ^{abrupt} retreat from what he had ~~secretly~~ discovered to be Cuban roulette. But he was right to do it, without anxiety.

\CII\OpEd.4
October 26, 1987
0300

Twenty-five years ago this morning, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev broadcast a message to President John F. Kennedy over Moscow radio agreeing--as proposed by Kennedy in a letter sent just the night before--to dismantle and ~~remove~~ ^{nothing new than} Soviet surface-to-surface missiles from Cuba in return for a US pledge not to invade Cuba. He thus ended the Cuban Missile Crisis on American terms, as abruptly, and for American officials as unexpectedly, as it began. No one on the American side knew why.

Not ~~one~~ ^{the} member of the ExComm--Executive Committee of the National Security Council, more than a dozen officials who had been advising the President almost continuously since the missiles on Cuba were discovered--had expected the Soviets to accept these terms so soon after they were proposed, if at all: (without an American shot having been fired, and without any countermeasures, threats, or other efforts to press further his demand ...)

*what
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had to do
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had to
cancel...*

This included the hawks who were confident that the Soviets, outgunned, would accept without reprisal elsewhere the destruction of their missile sites on Cuba by American bombing. And it included the President and the small group of officials who were aware that the President's brother, Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, in transmitting the President's letter with these terms to Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin the night before, had also passed on a carefully-limited promise, and a threat, amounting to an ultimatum. The promise--that American missiles in Turkey would be removed four to five months after removal of Soviet missiles in Cuba--was politically worthless to Khrushchev, because it was strictly conditioned on his keeping it secret, refraining ever from alluding to it as part of a deal or a quid pro quo. At the same time, by showing a willingness to discuss the Turkish missiles in this context, at least in private, it hinted that further Soviet pressure for a public exchange might be successful.

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delivering the package of proposals and warnings to Dobrynin. And such pressures might have won what he sought for Khrushchev. Dean Rusk has now revealed (NYT, -----) that Kennedy had directed arrangements, if Khrushchev, as Kennedy expected, failed to accept his terms by the next day, to have U Thant, Secretary General of the UN, to reissue Khrushchev's call for a trade of Turkish and Cuban missiles in his own name, with the assurance that the US would accept it. RFK's "statement of fact," in other words, was a bluff. Khrushchev could not know that for sure, but he had good reason to guess it (including RFK's willingness to discuss the Turkish missiles in private, even though rejecting a public trade) and a half day's probing would have revealed it. The Soviets did not lack strong nerves; work on the Soviet missiles toward making them operational had proceeded at a "feverish" pace, night and day, in the face of Presidential warnings since October 22.

Yet within hours of RFK's talk with Dobrynin--between 1 and 3 AM in Cuba, a Soviet general told U Thant in Havana a few days later--the order to dismantle the missiles was received in Cuba. Dismantling began at 5 AM, and the message to Kennedy was broadcast--assuring faster transmission than diplomatic channels--about 9 AM EDT. Why the rush?

Fyodor Burlatsky, Khrushchev's speechwriter who drafted some of the private correspondence and Khrushchev's account of the crisis to the Presidium in December, described the mood of urgency surrounding that message in a conversation this month in Cambridge, where he was a guest of the Kennedy School. "They were very, very nervous at this time," he told me. "The letter of October 28 was not drafted in the Kremlin, nor in the Politburo; it was drafted at Khrushchev's dacha, by a very small group. As soon as it was done, they ran with it to the radio station. That is to say, they sent it by car, very fast; in fact, the car had some trouble on the way, an obstruction, which delayed it. When it arrived, the manager of the station himself ran down the steps, snatched the message from the hands of the man in the car, and ran up the steps to broadcast it immediately." I never knew why they were ~~so nervous~~.
in such a rush.

845

There was good reason. Robert Kennedy had begun his discussion with Dobrynin, at 7:45 PM the previous evening, with a warning on the serious implications of the attacks that day on American reconnaissance planes overflying Cuba. Cuban anti-aircraft artillery had been firing at low-flying planes, damaging at least one, and a surface-to-air rocket, presumed to be Soviet-manned, had downed a high-flying U-2 and killed its pilot, the first casualty of the confrontation. "...our photographic reconnaissance planes would have to continue to fly over Cuba," RFK told the Ambassador, as he recounts in his memoir, "and if the Cubans or Soviets shot at these planes, then we would have to shoot back." In his discussion with me in 1964, RFK was more specific; "If one more plane was destroyed," he

told Dobrynin, "We would hit all the SAMs immediately, and probably the [surface-to-surface] missiles as well, and we would probably follow that with an invasion...So they had 48 hours to start getting their missiles out, unless they hit another recon plane before that, in which case the whole operation would get underway immediately."

1032

Khrushchev, receiving this deterrent warning shortly thereafter, knew something that the Kennedy brothers did not know, and which none of their advisors--as demonstrated by the transcript, recently released by Harvard, of the October 27 meetings of the ExComm--had guessed at as a possibility on that Saturday. He could not obey this warning, however desperately he might want to. He could not prevent antiaircraft artillery from attacking, and possibly destroying, one of the low-flying reconnaissance planes to be expected over Cuba the next day, perhaps as early as first light. Castro controlled that artillery; and with an independence that, the transcript shows, was unimagined by any of the ExComm members, caught in a Cold War stereotype of Soviet relations with a "satellite", he had ordered it to fire at planes invading Cuban airspace, regardless of the wishes of Soviet officials. As Castro put it to Tad Szulc, "It was we who gave the order to fire against the low-level flights...We had simply presented our viewpoint to [the Soviets], our opposition to the low-level flights, and we ordered our batteries to fire on them." (Fidel, p. 584)

There is even much testimony that the downing of the U-2 by a Soviet SAM, which triggered JFK's commitment to retaliate on a large scale to any further shootdown and his secret ultimatum on the missiles, had occurred without and even against orders by Khrushchev and the Soviet high command. Burlatsky says this emphatically, claiming that Khrushchev had given precise orders that Soviet forces should not provoke or initiate any attacks and that he was "shocked" and apprehensive at the news of the shootdown. Khrushchev himself says this in his memoirs, where he attributes the shootdown of the U-2 to Cubans under Castro's orders, adding "At first we were concerned that President Kennedy wouldn't be able to stomach the humiliation." (554).

Exactly who, other than Khrushchev, directed the shootdown of the U-2, is still uncertain and controversial. Burlatsky told me he remains "absolutely certain" it was Castro; his colleague Mikoyan believes it was a Soviet officer, acting insubordinately; Robert Shakne of CBS reported the latter view from a defecting Cuban air force general; Castro himself took credit in speaking to U Thant immediately after the event (and, off-the-record, to Frank Mankiewicz, Saul Landau and Kirby Jones in 1974), and a Soviet general told U Thant it was "a Cuban colonel"; but Castro denied Cuban control to Tad Szulc more recently. And in my 1964 study I came across recent intelligence--the basis for which has been revealed this month by Seymour Hersh (Washington Post, October 11)--that Soviet forces had been engaged in a serious

firefight, suffering 18 casualties, on the night of October 26 in the vicinity of the SAM site from which the U-2 was struck the next morning, possibly while the site was under the control of the Soviet unit's adversaries, whose nationality was unidentified but whom the intelligence analysts presumed to be Cubans.

Again, the October 27 transcript reveals no guess by anyone of any of these possibilities; another stereotype prevailed, of iron control by the Soviet high command over Soviet forces and weaponry, precluding any such hypothesis. Indeed, the fact that the SAM was presumed to be Soviet-manned (though NSA had learned of mixed Soviet-Cuban crews by this time, Hersh reports) led to the unquestioned interpretation of the shootdown as a deliberate escalation, directed by Khrushchev himself. Hence the President's turn to an ultimatum, and personal warning, transmitted by his brother, against shooting down any further recon planes. Transmitted to the wrong party. For whoever shot down the U-2 on Saturday morning, Khrushchev could have had considerable confidence that the Soviet chain of command could prevent further attacks on the high-flying planes, which could not be reached by Cuban antiaircraft (unless forced down to lower altitude by malfunction or damage from a SAM, either of which *may* ~~might~~ have occurred on Saturday's shootdown). But he could not prevent at all the destruction of a low-flying plane, which would be enough to trigger the destruction of Soviet SAMs and probably his missiles as well.

What Khrushchev faced early Sunday morning (Moscow time) was not a 48-hour ultimatum but a 12-hour ultimatum. Unless he announced the immediate dismantling of the missiles in Cuba, he could well lose them, with heavy Soviet casualties, soon after low-flying planes flew over Cuba at first light. There was no time for explanations about Cuban responsibility (which would not, probably, have halted US reconnaissance or massive reprisal for Cuban attacks) or for further probes or threats. Loss of control of events, and even of Soviet/Cuban forces, was not a future contingency to be feared; it was already a reality.

*He could
negotiate
with
US by
getting out*

And the same was true for the US; Presidential undertakings, ignorant of the true state of control on the other side, had made US operations blindly responsive to initiatives by the Cubans. Between them, the two superpower leaders had contrived to pass the trigger to World War III to Fidel Castro: aged 35, intensely nationalistic, macho, threatened with direct attack, feeling humiliated both by his adversary and his ally, uncalculating of the consequences of his actions to vindicate Cuban sovereignty: not, in short, an easy man to coerce or deter, even if US threats had been correctly addressed to him: nor easy for his superpower ally to control, although that ally's forces were hostage to his initiatives. And in either respect, not unlike the current leaderships of Iraq and Iran, in a region where US naval forces have taken on a deterrent mission like that of Soviet missile forces in Cuba.

Khrushchev's position on the morning of October 28, 1962 was not an enviable one (nor was that of the US, though it was less aware of it).

\cii\postoped
October 31, 1987

NTY Oped came out today: "The Day Castro Almost Started World War III".

Notes on elements left out of piece, in cutting it; and further aspects to be discussed.

1. "Why couldn't Khrushchev just tell Kennedy that the Cubans had fired the AA, and that the SAM firing was insubordinate?"

2. "Who fired the SAM?" Evidence.

3. Whole set of Burlatsky quotes: including, camouflage; assurance by High Command that secrecy could be preserved, that K could get away with it. (B didn't believe; K wanted to believe.) "I'm certain that Castro caused it."

4. Firefight: possibilities. (and see 2 and 3). Including Mongoose.

5. Relations of superpowers to small allies: On the one hand, the US (and SU) takes great risks to avoid losing or damaging the relationship, or its "credibility." (See K fears of "losing Cuba"--K memoirs, Burlatsky--). At the same time, to avoid this, it risks the destruction of the small power itself! (Cuba, Turkey; VN--both sides!) The latter is part of a general lack of concern about the small power's interests, in a crunch: both US and SU prepared to sacrifice latter, without even consulting: though US showed more concern about informing, bringing Turks aboard (fear of reaction of other allies if Turkey was dumped; and see French reaction anyway).

CHECK: article on Turkish politics at the time; MacMillan's memoirs, on his reaction.

See my involvement in Turkish question: options; cable to Turks, Hare, Finletter; to Nitze...that night, to mirror; crying, with hsr.

6. Estimates of the probability of war: how were they reflected, how were they acted on, or not acted on. Nitze to hsr; hawks to Blight; JFK. What was their basis; what was a realistic basis.

7. What would have happened if K had not folded? If Castro had shot down recon anyway? If JFK had folded on Saturday?

8. Different article: Why did SU get in?

9. Why did Cuba allow missiles? See evolution of crisis out of Mongoose and invasion fears: i.e., a covert operation (for both SU and Cuba).

10. General tendency on US side to ignore independence of SU